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JULIANNE BURTON

Sing, the Beloved Country:

An Interview with Tizuka Yamasaki on *Patriamada*

On April 10, 1984—exactly twenty years and nine days after the military took power in a coup d'état—more than a million Brazilians gathered in Rio's Candelaria Square to demonstrate in favor of direct presidential elections. Three days before what would turn out to be the most massive demonstration in Brazilian history, I told my producer, Caca (Carlos Alberto) Diniz, that I wanted to make a movie about what was going on around us—Brazil's return to democratic government after two decades of military dictatorship.

I am not a political person in the traditional sense; I do not belong to any political party. But the fact is that right before and during the months recorded in the film, *everybody* was taking part in the political life of the country. It was the most remarkable thing that has ever happened in Brazil. People who had never been politically active were demonstrating in the streets, joining committees, enthusiastically reasserting the political prerogatives after being barred from participation for so many years. The spirit was contagious—it spread through the entire population. It was an extraordinary historical moment. As a result of this redemocratization process, we rediscovered our love for our country, we reclaimed our national anthem, we recovered the symbols of national pride.

I wanted to register all the enthusiasm, all the activity, all the doubt and debate in a film. I wanted my film to have a documentary dimension, but I didn't want it to be a documentary. I wanted to make a *fictional* film against the backdrop of real events as they happened. And I had to begin immediately if I was going to be able to include the Candelaria event. Caca was incredulous: "But Tizuka, how can I arrange for you to start shooting in just three days? Where's the script? Where's the cast?"

"No cast?" I replied, "No problem!" and I grabbed the phone. I was not looking for actors; I was looking for people who were, among other things, actors and actresses. People who were energetic and productive and capable of participating in a very independent way, sharing ideas and responsibility. People who were actively taking part in the redemocratization process just like the characters whom they would portray. I had three characters in mind: a female journalist in her early twenties, politically progressive, who had lived her entire life under the dictatorship, and two male characters: a struggling film-maker in his mid-thirties, also progressive but not as uncompromising as the journalist, and a prominent middle-aged businessman who would take a pro-nationalist line.

I called Debora Bloch, a very interesting young actress and theatrical producer. Extremely hardworking and combative, a very modern woman—Debora had all qualities I wanted Carolina (Lina), *Patriamada*'s female lead, to have. I called Walmor Chagas, a leading Brazilian actor who is also a theatrical impresario. I thought this would lend an essential dimension to the character he was to play, the industrialist Rocha Queiroz, another kind of entrepreneur. I knew Buza Ferraz, whom I cast as the young film-maker Goias, only slightly. I chose him in part because his real-life occupation as a theatrical director was such a close parallel to his character's line of work. I told the three of them then, "I want to make a film about a film-maker, an entrepreneur, and a journalist against the backdrop of current events as the country makes the transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule, and I want to begin immediately. But at this point I have neither script nor financing. Are you interested?" Fortunately, they were.

The overriding concept was for these three

NOTE: This interview is condensed from a dozen hours of conversations conducted in three countries over a four-month period. During the first session, in September 1986 on the occasion of the North American première of *Patriamada* at the Toronto Festival of Festivals, Zuzana M. Pick also participated. After translating and editing the original interview, Burton met again with the film-maker in October at the University of Iowa and in December at the Havana Festival. All sessions were conducted in Portuguese; the recorded conversations have been rendered into colloquial English, extensively edited, and reorganized.

fictional leads, and a half dozen other, secondary characters, to interact with and against Brazilian society in transition. Using methods which I'll explain shortly, we managed to have the fictional characters interact on camera with many of the leading figures in the national drama we were all living through—the outgoing military president João Figueiredo, president-elect Tancredo Neves, the governors of Rio and São Paulo, to mention only the most prominent figures.

Edgar Moura, a cinematographer who has worked with me for several years, agreed to shoot the film. I asked my sister Yurika Yamasaki to handle the art direction. Like Caca, these two had worked on my previous features, *Gaijin* (1980) and *Paraiba, mulher macho* (1982).

Finally I called screenwriter Alcione Araujo, whom I had only recently met, and asked him to write a scene for the three characters which would happen at the beginning of the Candelaria demonstration. There was no story at that point. All I knew was that Goias, the film-maker, would be making a combination documentary-musical about Brazil called *Patriamada,* and that he lacked the funds to do it the way he wanted. I knew that his character would be grappling with all the problems that Brazilian film-makers face daily—conflicts on the domestic front, struggles to get loans from the banks, the need to make commercials just to survive.

The sequence we developed involved the entrepreneur, Rocha Queiroz, who observes the crowds gathering for the Candelaria demonstration from his office suite in an adjacent skyscraper. Moved by what he sees, he descends briefly to the street, but finally opts to witness the event alone from the roof terrace of his office building. Goias, the film-maker, is filming the demonstration for his documentary. He has asked his reporter friend, Lina, to hunt out and interview celebrities in the crowd. As we were shooting this sequence, Debora/Lina managed to interview the musician Milton Nascimento, the actress Sonia Braga, the judge Sobral Pinto, Leonel Brizola, governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Luis Ignacio de Silva, leader of the Workers' Party, and several other public figures. One "prominent citizen" declined to be interviewed, however: the industrialist Rocha Queiroz. Lina requests another

Tisuka Tamasaki, director of PATRIAMADA—*a film that tells a story integrated into documentary footage of real Brazilian political events*

opportunity, and so the three characters are linked.

Some of them knew Debora, some of them knew me, and they might have wondered what we were about, but it was our first day of shooting, and the fact was that we really didn't know where the project would lead. In any case, no one asked us to explain ourselves. When Debora approached them with a microphone to find out why they were there, they simply responded as they would to any reporter. The demonstration itself was so extraordinarily absorbing that no one paid much attention to the comparatively minor spectacle of a film crew at work.

Some funny things happened while we were filming the Candelaria demonstration, incidents of the sort that would recur throughout the project. When we climbed upon the platform to get close to Governor Brizola, for example, we found him in the process of forcing people off because the platform was over-crowded. "Get down! Get off! There's no room!" he was yelling. "Lights!" I shouted, and no sooner did we illuminate him that Brizola became all smiles, welcoming Debora and her microphone.

Debora got so into her role as reporter that she often pushed the real reporters aside until she got to the front row. That was just what we needed, because we could only film when one

of our actors was there in the midst of things.

We usually had two cameras filming at the same time—Edgar's and Nonato Estrela's. Nonato was our second cameraman, but he was also a character in the film: cameraman for the documentary being shot by Goias. Buza/Goias and Nonato often worked at a distance while Edgar and I were shooting in close-up.

When we viewed the rushes from Candelaria, we were delighted. The footage was terrific. About two weeks later, in Brasilia, the Congress was scheduled to vote on the Dante da Oliveira amendment in favor of direct elections. We decided to shoot the balloting, even though the funds necessary to finance the complete film had yet to be raised.

We were making preparations to leave for Brasilia when we learned that the Txucarramaes Indians in Xingu had declared war against the government. They had cut off traffic on the Transamazonian Highway by seizing the ferryboat which transports vehicles across the Xingu river. They had also covered the landing strip with tree trunks so that planes could not land without their cooperation. The Indians had sequestered five FUNAI [National Indian Office] officials and were threatening to kill them if the government did not respond to their demands to protect tribal lands.

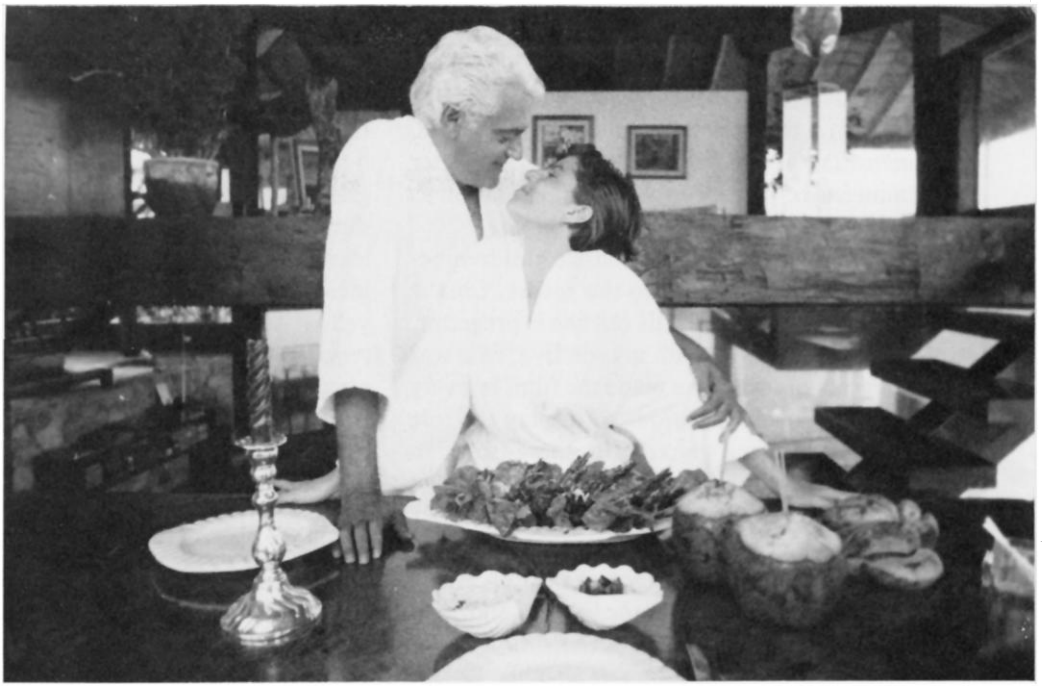
I could not afford to miss the opportunity to film this uprising, because it fit so well into the documentary that the character Goias was shooting. But Congress was meeting on Wednesday, so I arranged to film the Indian uprising the day before. In Brasilia, slogging my way through the proper bureaucratic channels, I happened to run into a friend who had been one of the backers of *Paraiba, mulher macho.* When she found out that we were about to go on a shoot in the Amazon, she wanted to come along. I agreed to take her as a member of the crew if she would let us use her private jet to transport us from Brasilia to Xingu and back.

The Indians received us very hospitably. They made their declarations and we did our shoot. We were just preparing to depart when one of the plane's engines refused to start. The Indians began to suspect that we might be trying to pull a fast one. They moved off to one side, conferring and watching us from a distance. The Indians announced that we had to be out of there by nightfall or else. It was getting darker and darker and the engine still would not start. (In the final cut of *Patriamada,* there's a shot of Buza/Goias on the runway as night is coming on; the anxiety on his face is genuine.) Suddenly, the Indians grabbed us and pushed us into a little motorized launch. Maybe they're going to kill us, I thought.

After traveling an hour through unfathomable darkness, we arrived at a jungle outpost, San Jose de Bang Bang. (No kidding!) The Indians said that only the mechanic and the pilot could return to the plane the next day to try to fix it. I was frantic for fear of losing the chance to film the Congressional session in Brasilia. There wasn't even a telephone; I had no way to contact the producer in Rio to request a substitute crew. I realized just how far I was from civilization. Eventually a small plane landed, overflowing with people, chickens, crates of supplies. I grabbed the carmeraman and the soundman and stormed aboard. It turned out that the plane was headed to Goias. From there the two of them could get another plane to take them to Brasilia where Debora and Walmore were waiting. As luck would have it, the next day a FUNAI plane arrived to pick up a sick person. Buza and I managed to get on, leaving behind only the owner of the broken-down airplane, and a journalist friend. We flew directly to Brasilia, took a quick shower, and rushed over to film the congressional session. Incredibly enough, the cameraman and soundman arrived the same time we did, just as things were about to begin. When I saw them, I began to laugh—"Hey, didn't I just see you guys in San Jose de Bang Bang?" From the depths of the bush to the power center of the country in the blink of an eye!

When we saw that day's rushes, we were again very pleased. We now had three very important days' worth of footage—Candelaria, Xingu, and Brasilia. Caca Diniz liked what we had shot. So did a Frenchman whose company had coproduced a very successful film by a partner of mine; they decided to come in on our production. It was then the end of April.

As Alcione and I began shaping a story around the three days of footage already shot, Paulo Maluf, an ultrarightwing protegé of the military, declared his candicacy for the presidency. He was wealthy enough to buy all the votes he needed. To make matters worse, no candidate had yet come forth on the liberal side. I got very discouraged. I thought, why



Industrialist Rocha (Walmor Chagas) and journalist Lina (Debora Bloch) in PATRIAMADA

make a film to commemorate the end of two decades of military dictatorship if I'll have to end it with the elctoral victory of a reactionary like Maluf? I wanted to throw our footage into the garbage can. But before long we began to take a certain perspective on the situation. This enabled us to recapture our enthusiasm and start working on the script again. By October, we had all the production money in place. At last we were able to put the crew on salary and to compensate people for the time they had already put in.

We constructed a fictional storyline to interweave the documentary sequences which we had already shot, but that storyline also had to take into account events that were happening as we filmed and future events which we could not predict with any certainty. So the shape of the story was constantly changing. Alcione and I started each day reading the morning newspapers and conferring by phone about the day's script. Every new political development caused us to modify our storyline. We often went to film with just a scrap of paper. The film never had a conventional screenplay—just a collection of scenes which kept piling up, written in response to daily events. Many of these sequences were later omitted or reshot in response to changing political circumstances.

There were considerable political differences among us. One of our backers was a Maluf supporter. Debora, at the other extreme, belonged to the Workers' Party—before, during and after the filming. Like many young people, she was determined *not* to vote for the "lesser evil." Buza also belonged to the Workers' Party, but he had a more flexible attitude. He argued that we had to support Tancredo because there simply wasn't a representative of the younger generation who could win election.

Within the context of the film, I used Debora's character to challenge the Rocha Queiroz character, to provoke him to go from speech-making to action. His speeches are a "documentary element" in the sense that they were not written for the film but "borrowed" from Antonio Ermirio de Morais, a leading Brazilian industrialist who at that time was constantly speaking out against the military government, speculation and other abuses by those in power. I found it intriguing that such a prominent, powerful businessman could espouse such a progressive, pro-nationalist line.

During the months we spent working on the film, we all experienced political doubts and conflicts. We filmed several discussions among our characters which we eventually had to throw out as irrelevant because either the situation had changed markedly or else we had. In addition to this kind of political involvement and debate, I wanted my characters to reflect my own thoughts and experiences. The Lina character, for example, was born in 1964, the year of the military coup. I wanted her to embody the desires of my generation, which is somewhat older than she is—to be freer, more

independent, less shackled by compromises, less inclined to respect the rules of a retrograde, *machista* society. I wanted to use her character as a means of provoking my own generation to take a new stance toward their country.

I wanted the film to emphasize children because they are our links to the future. Lina is very happy when she finds out she is pregnant. My own relationship with my son Ilya, who was three years old when we made the film, is a very intense one. He was supposed to play the role of Goias's son, and I hired a Japanese-Brazilian actress to play his mother, but he came down with scarlet fever.

In large part we owe the children's bedtime fantasy sequence to singer-composer Alceu Valenca, who provided the music and also played the magician in the scene. "Soledao," *Patriamada*'s opening song, is also his. Carlos Fernando, who frequently collaborates with Valenca, came up with the lyrics for the title song, which I think are absolutely terrific: "Let's cook a huge *feijoada* with a laser beam." Mix everything together to see what comes out. That song is a metaphor for Brazil and for what we were trying to do in *Patriamada* as well.

The musical score played a very important role in shaping the film. I was hooked on the idea of making a musical and began to feel uncomfortable with the footage we had shot with the Indians because it seemed like conventional documentary. On the other hand, I intended to use a lot of television footage, because how was I going to traverse the entire country in order to locate its principal problems for the film Goias was making, unless I took advantage of television's vast archive?

I decided that the film—or at least the film-within-the-film—should be one big music video, a reportage set to music. It occurred to me that the documentary material on the Indians would have a different reading if it were edited in that other tone. That decision gave me the freedom to start mixing things together even more.

Take the Congressional sequence, for example. We thought, Why should we edit that in the style of conventional documentary, since TV Globo was already doing just that day and night? Shouldn't we instead somehow offer a commentary on an event which the public had just witnessed *ad nauseam* on their TV screens a few months before?

The singer Olivia Byington pointed us in the right direction when she sang the independence hymn at the first São Paulo rally. When she began to sing, the crowd started jeering, because during all those years of dictatorship we had learned to hate everything associated with the idea of *patria*. People refused to wear green or yellow, the colors of the Brazilian flag. They repudiated the national anthem and all patriotic songs. For years, we hated being Brazilians because we felt that we had turned the country over to the military without a fight. But when Olivia persisted in front of that hostile multitude, singing in such a pure, limpid way that people were moved in spite of themselves. Before she had finished, she had the entire crowd singing along with her.

I didn't make a final decision on how to handle the Congressional sequence until the editing stage. The direct sound from that sequence was very loud—people yelling out their votes, "YES!" "NO!" "NO!" "YES!" There came a moment when the delegates seemed like clowns. They were the ones who were supposed to be representing the popular will, yet they were voting *against* direct elections which all of Brazil had been clamoring for. I realized while viewing that footage that their clownlike aspect stood out even more once the direct sound was removed. So I decided to substitute Olivia's voice singing the national anthem quietly, a capella.

I think that if the film has a certain coherence, we owe it to having taken those risks. There was no way to guarantee our investors that *Patriamada* would turn a profit because we did not know how the political conjuncture would turn out. And the filmic language which we were developing was also risky. We had no way of judging whether we were headed in the right direction. Our guiding concern was not to lose touch with the emotional high which we all felt when we were filming in the streets. We had to search for ways to sustain that emotional intensity. The way we used music was one of these.

The biggest dilemma we faced in shaping the film was how was it going to end? We agonized over this, because none of us knew what was going to happen to the country. At one point I called together cast, crew, and associates. I said, "We're going to talk this out. We're each going to give our opinions and see where they take us. And we're going to film it as we talk."

That scene is included in *Patriamada.* It is not really Lina the fictional character speaking there, but Debora Bloch communicating her own views. And the same for all the others who appear—our investors, our producer, our scriptwriter, the other actors.

Once we had figured out the political denouement, we still had to resolve the personal conflicts. Who would Lina end up with? I didn't want her to have to choose between the two men, but every time I raised the idea that Lina would stay with both, the atmosphere always grew strained. Ironically, both actors, Buza and Walmore, approached me in private, each trying to convince me that Lina should end up with *his* character.

As director, I felt quite proud that the discussion of all these matters was very open. I was confident that I was making a superdemocratic film. Everybody felt entitled to give their opinion. As director, I just had to be careful not to lose the guiding thread, but I encouraged maximum participation. Still, there came a time when I realized that the only person who really knew what was happening with the film was me. I decided to affirm Lina's right to have an abortion if that was her choice, but we decided that in the end she should opt to have the baby, as affirming her commitment to the future.

One of the things about our production is that we had a great deal of good luck—probably because we maintained a very open attitude. We were always ready for anything. Everything was potentially important. We approached the filming as if we were composing a rough draft—without preconceptions or fixed ideas. We let the actual events shape the fictional ones. I think this openness was a great advantage.

In early December we went back to Brazilia to film a sequence with the outgoing military president, João Figueiredo. This was our second-to-last shoot, and it was crucial. I'm certain that if I weren't a woman, I would never have obtained official permission. Despite the fact that they were voluntarily turning the regime over to civilians, the military rulers were still quite apprehensive about what would happen to them. Right then, in Argentina, the former military leaders were on trial for their crimes. The Brazilian armed forces wanted to ensure that no such confrontation would happen in their country, and they were predictably leery about film projects like ours, which strongly endorsed the return to direct forms of democracy.

Lina (Debora Bloch) and Goías (Buza Ferraz) in PATRIAMADA

Yet I was a woman. The prevailing attitude seemed to be: "A woman? Oh, no problem. Women pose no danger to us." I asked for authorization to film the outgoing military president, João Batista Figueiredo, entering and leaving Planalto Palace, a ritual ceremony. I took the actors with me to the shoot, as always, though I had no idea how I would insert them into the sequence. We had agreed that they had to always be ready to come on camera at a given signal from me.

In the midst of the shooting, I inquired of the press secretary, "Would it be all right if the actor Walmor Chagas gave his regards to the president?" To my amazement, he answered simply, "Of course." I made a signal to Walmor and he stepped forward, quite disconcerted, not sure how to act with the president. Figuereido himself came to our rescue. Because Walmore is, after all, a very well-known actor, Figueiredo took the initiative, approaching Walmor and extending his hand. That simple greeting was everything I could have wished for in order to give the character, who was supposed to be a super-important entrepreneur, the necessary veracity.

The press secretary then volunteered, "The president will now enter the palace for a holiday ceremony organized by his staff. Would you like to film this event too?" "Of course," I answered, though at the time I wasn't at all sure to what purpose. When we entered the hall, we saw Figueiredo there, flanked on the left by all the military officials and on the right by the

press corps. My dilemma was solved. I simply told Debora/Lina and Buza/Goias to join the reporters, and I began to shoot the event. But the sound track of the ceremony was of no real interest to me. Later we came up with the idea of combining these images with a voice-over of a speech of Figueiredo's.

There was another unexpected occurrence, the last of many "gifts" which came our way that day. After the president's descent and his departure by car through the crowd of demonstrators, which we filmed from inside the governmental palace, the logical thing would have been for me to tell Edgar to stop shooting. But by some miracle he kept the camera rolling as a uniformed guard came into view, drew the great glass doors of the palace shut behind the departed president, bolted them tight, and double-checked to make sure the lock was secure. This act is so wonderfully definitive, so symbolically final: Goodbye to the military rulers, and good riddance; these doors are now locked tight against their return.

My philosophy is that you have to hold onto your optimism and sense of humor, no matter what production difficulties you face. You have to undertake your project convinced that you're going to be able to film whatever you want. *Patriamada* got made through sheer will power, because we all wanted so much to do it.

I felt positive that when the film hit the theaters it would provoke nation-wide discussion and debate. I wasn't particularly interested in whether people enjoyed it or not; that's not why we made it. The film was meant to stimulate and challenge people. It was an experiment, a different approach. We hoped that *Patriamada* would encourage others to engage in the kinds of discussions that we had had while making it.

The rest of the group shared my sense that the film was a privileged event. They were all deeply committed to the project. There was the time, for example, when the crew was scheduled to have a well-deserved day off. We had been filming like crazy and everyone needed a rest. But then I learned that Tancredo was scheduled to speak at a businessmen's luncheon in Rio that same day. Edgar and Walmore both agreed to give up their day off. Then, before I knew it, most of the crew members were saying, "I want to go too!" When I went to shoot the sequence, almost the entire crew was on hand. We all had to pose as reporters in order to gain entrance to the hall. We were afraid that we might be denied admission. After we made it in, I began jumping for joy like a kid. And so did everyone else. Because these things were not in our control, it was a greater victory for us when they worked out, as they so often did, in our favor.

We released the film in early March. Our exhibition strategy entailed several successive weeks of premieres, first in Rio, then São Paulo, then the Northeast. But before the first week was out, Tancredo was hospitalized for a "minor" ailment. In the ensuing weeks, minor became major and, in April, Tancredo died without ever having been inaugurated. During this time, everyone was glued to their television sets. No one felt like going to the movies, and *our* movie was particularly difficult to view given its recapitulation of all the events leading up to Tancredo's election.

It turned out that *Patriamada* was the second-highest grossing Brazilian film of 1985, but it only drew 600,000 spectators while we had expected a million or more. What disappointed us most was that it never provoked the kind of debate we had anticipated—not even in the film-making community. At the annual Gramado awards—the Brazilian equivalent of the Oscars—we won the award for best sound, period. I was very struck by this non-response because it was so completely at odds with my own sense of the film.

I was very curious to view *Patriamada* with a non-Brazilian audience. I doubted that a foreign audience could ever understand the film because the political process which it reflects was so complex and so intense. I was really amazed when, several months after the anti-climax of its Brazilian release, *Patriamada* won a prize at the Biarritz Festival. I think I had stopped believing that it was a good film.

Later it occurred to me that people who had seen the film in Brazil had not really *seen* the film but rather simply witnessed a record of historical events through the filter of the intense emotions they were experiencing at the time. I began to suspect that Brazilian audiences had rejected the fictional component because they felt so closely tied to the documentary aspects. I think that now that some time has passed, people might view the film in a different way and have a different reponse.

To date, no film I've directed has gratified me more. *Patriamada* was like an offering made in exchange for the opportunity to participate in an extraordinary historical moment. It

was a gift that I wanted to give my country: the discovery that we could love and take pride in Brazil. There was a rare sense of privilege and perfection about that experience, and that sensation stays with me as I move on to new undertakings.

BILL NICHOLS

History, Myth, and Narrative in Documentary

Documentary film operates in literal compliance with the writ of *habeas corpus*. "You should have the body"—without it the legal process comes to a standstill. "You should have the body"—without it the documentary tradition lacks its primary referent, the real social actor(s) of whose historical engagement it speaks. Documentary film raises in acute form the persistent question of what to do with people, how to represent them, or, how to represent the human body as a cinematic signifier in a manner commensurate with its status in the ensemble of social relations.

This question has taken shape around a particular film, *Roses in December* (Ana Carrigan and Bernard Stone, 1982).[1] *Roses* seeks to restore meaning to a life that has been lost—the life of Jean Donovan, a lay missionary murdered along with three North American nuns by a government death squad in El Salvador. *Roses* takes up the problems and issues that surround the stereotyping, dramatizing, or mythologizing of a human life. It also avoids the ideologically regressive response that followed the destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger*. In this case the process of extreme mythologization served to compensate for the embarrassing absence of the astronauts' bodies and the overwhelming presence of narrow-minded professionalism, venality, the promotion of spectacle and bureaucratic inhumanity. The seven astronauts were offered up frozen, as timeless icons for the collective memory. In *Roses,* the absent body of the murdered Jean Donovan is re-placed in history rather than displaced into an ethereal eternity.

Roses in December enlists our desire to understand a barbaric act in order to weave a complex set of homilies on the relation between the individual and the collective, the nature of religious witness and service, the linkage, at least in Latin America, of religion and revolution, and the ethical/political dimensions of death and its commemoration. Commemoration of and dedication to the spirit of Jean Donovan, offered through the narrative-like closure of the film—beginning with the unearthing of Donovan's body at an unmarked gravesite and ending with the emotionally powerful "Departure Ceremony" a year later in honor of new volunteers for church service in Central America—provide a mechanism to satisfy viewer involvement even as this mechanism also leads us to recognize that full satisfaction requires additional action in the historical world to which the film refers. The first scene uses archival footage which documents the discovery of the gravesite and the unearthing of the four women's bodies. The partially decomposed remains unsettle the gaze enormously. The camera violates strong taboos in its prolonged record of this act of opening a grave and bringing the dead back into the sight of the living. These bodies are tangible evidence of selves no longer bound into the imaginary unity of the subject, no longer the agency of action but only brutalized remains that evidence the actions of others.

Roses in December is also a complex mix of (1) documents such as home movies, the testimony of friends, news footage of the disinterment and the pronouncements of public officials, (2) narrative strategies such as the imaginative reenactment of the crime itself and the investigation undertaken by the film-makers (less in order to determine who did it than to discover what can be learned from a situation where murder has been done) and (3) mythologizing strategies such as an iconography of reverence and a moral concern for personal

was a gift that I wanted to give my country: the discovery that we could love and take pride in Brazil. There was a rare sense of privilege and perfection about that experience, and that sensation stays with me as I move on to new undertakings.

BILL NICHOLS

History, Myth, and Narrative in Documentary

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sacrifice, altruistic service and the potential for self-chosen martyrdom. None of these elements is unique to *Roses* and its overall structure is not particularly trailblazing. The film does offer, however, an exemplary demonstration of how the human body can be represented through a weave of materials that stand in for a person who is dead.

In what ways can the body of an individual be represented in documentary? By means of what conceptual framework can we imbue the body—its appearance and actions—with significance? If all our knowledge exists inside sets, frames or discourses, inside domains of understanding, then this would surely apply to our knowledge of the physical body insofar as it bears meaning and significance for ourselves and others. *Roses in December* points to three possibilities that I believe underlie all documentary. It holds all three in complex suspension and avoids pitfalls that come from stressing one possibility at the expense of the others. These three possible frames are (1) reference to the historical body of a social actor, (2) the representation of a narrative character, and (3) the transformation of the body through the iconography of the heroic or mythic. *Roses,* for example, reconstitutes the body of Jean Donovan as a living person, narrative character, and exemplary persona—but without stressing any one possibility more than the other two. Traditional biography, so often presented as "A Life," in fact counters the errant trajectory of life with the smooth curve of dramatic narrative form. It might more properly be called "A Story." Its unity and closure stand at odds to the open-endedness and incoherence of life as it is lived. *Roses in December,* however, operates in the crease between a lived life and a recounted life. Like historical fiction films, *Roses* gives us a life that is also a story but in such a way that the distance between the two frames is never covered over, the closure is incomplete and the sense of historical contingency remains vivid. *Roses* squarely confronts the question of how to figure the body, how to structure or present the person situated in history within a text structured as narrative and conducive to myth.

Unlike historical fiction films, documentary films lack the problem of finding themselves with a body too many. When an actor reincarnates an historical person, the actor's very presence testifies to the gap between the text and the life to which it refers. A second individual assumes the place that was occupied by another, yet can neither become that other nor offer a performance that disregards it. The problem for documentary is the contrary one of possessing a body too few. It must represent an historical person (an agent of social activity) within a narrative field as a character (an agent of narrative functions), and within a mythic or contemplative field as an icon or symbol (a recipient of identificatory investments).

Mythic figures like celebrities or stars whom we meet in the flesh may unsettle us in ways similar to an encounter with a cadaver: their bodies represent the place where we expect to locate an abundance of meanings, but this place is, in fact, eerily empty. Stars and models, people whose mythic status depends on their repeated appearance in "vehicles" rather than on their personal achievements within the domain of the historical, can seem strangely vacant in person, "in the flesh." The physical bodies of stars and advertising models constitute the living site of a disguised objectification. Paradoxically, their actual bodies undergo reification so that possibilities for the presentation of an ideal self can be suggested. But what kind of self is it that must be presented in the form of an icon, an object, or, worse still, a commodity? Like the nude of classic oil painting, such bodies are condemned to never be themselves. This is a mock form of death; it is a mode of self-mortification or repression. Although the star or model is dressed up rather than laid out, although he or she is made up rather than embalmed, posed or presented rather than interred, and recovered through the fixed likeness of a photographic image rather than exhumed, the treatment of the body is nonetheless disturbingly similar to the processes of funereal ritual. Something of the historically contingent must be evacuated to render the body as icon or ideal. The absence of the provisional, of contingency, can be felt, but it is nothing compared to the felt absence of life itself when we confront death in the form of a cadaver. Reification achieves finality; mythologization may follow.

The mythic status of historical figures derives not from the representation of the body elsewhere but from its political or ethical deployment in history itself, and from the ways in

which texts like documentaries can elaborate upon that deployment. For social actors like Jean Donovan (or Charlie Clements, the ex-Air Force pilot who became a doctor and a Quaker and then spent a year giving medical treatment to the rural people of El Salvador—the subject of Deborah Schaeffer's *Witness to War*), the mythic quality of their lives derives from the two-dimensional space of history and interpersonal identification, represented to us in narrative form. For stars and models, the mythic occupies a two-dimensional realm of narrative and psychic identification, enriched with imaginary reference to the historical. This results in a very different relationship between the body and our psychic investment in its representation.

Roses in December, in dealing with a deceased individual, can only present its central character as a structuring absence that the film must reconstitute as a narrative character (the individualized agent of a series of narrative predicates) and an exemplary persona. In this project it departs quite sharply from string-of-interview documentaries like *Rosie the Rivetter* or *Babies and Banners* which reconstruct an historical episode, rather than an individual life, mainly by recruiting the testimony of participant-witnesses long after the fact. (In terms of structure and questions of "voice," however, *Roses* belongs more fully with string-of-interview documentaries than with their more self-reflexive and experimental successors.[2])

Roses is similar to those fiction films that set out to recover a past life, beginning at a point from which we may ask, "How did this come to pass?" In this task *Roses* bears a loose structural resemblance to films like *Young Mr. Lincoln, The Power and the Glory,* and *Mishima.* Still closer analogies exist with *Citizen Kane,* particularly in the stress on the enigmatic, in the use of a largely invisible reporter who travels afar to seek out the insights of those who knew the character, in the multiplicity of voices and evidentiary sources, and in the catalytic, galvanizing force of the moment of death. A significant difference is that the reporter in *Roses* is sometimes visible but never identified (it is co-director Ana Carrigan whom we see) rather than identified but seldom visible, as in the case of the fictitious character "Thompson." The difference follows the distinction between the documentary practice of observational film-makers whose lack of identity facilitates their function as a surrogate audience (what we see is what we would have seen had we been there) and the narrative practice of sharing the point of view of an individuated character (what we see is what Thompson saw when he was there). The minimally represented body of an investigating agent strengthens a film's claims of access to the real, the historical, without insisting on highly individualized, subjectivist, or self-reflexive interpretations of it.

Needless to say, in many films this distinction is not rigidly upheld. Some documentaries move much closer to the narrative practice of *Kane* where the film-maker becomes a character and our engagement with the film's world is from his/her point of view. A particularly stunning example occurs in Jon Alpert's *Hard Metals Disease,* where Alpert, like Ana Carrigan, acknowledges his own presence as investigator but becomes less a surrogate viewer and more vividly a character and social actor himself. He pushes this tendency beyond the activist form Michael Rubbo has given it in his National Film Board of Canada films.[3] Alpert, who did both the sound and image recording himself, in video, becomes far more a full participant than an investigator. He places himself in the thick of the action of *Hard Metals Disease,* which centers on the efforts of Frank Johnson and other victims of this industrial disease to spare yet more workers from the same fate. The camera becomes the locus of a character, somewhat like the highly subjectivized camera of *Lady of the Lake.* Alpert, represented by his hand-held camera, appears to talk *into* or *within* the frame, as a voice-off, as one character or social actor among many, rather than *out of* or *from beyond* the frame, as a voice-over, in the tradition of the voice of God commentator, the interviewer or eyewitness reporter. We only glimpse Alpert occasionally when his arm waves through the frame, but the inclusion of his own comments and the reactions of others to him makes the camera seem a character with a transparent body and the film-maker as much a social actor as those he films. The effect is far more convincing than in *Lady in the Lake* where the absence of the professional actor's body from the narrative frame impedes our identification.

A vivid illustration of Alpert's participant

role as narrative and social agent occurs in a sequence where Frank Johnson and several other workers go to Mexicali to warn workers at a branch lant of Valenite (the offending company that has, in effect, already poisoned them) of the dangers they face. Frank is initially stymied: the Mexican workers don't speak English. But then Alpert's voice shifts to Spanish, translating Johnson's warnings for him, with no less passion than Johnson himself. There is no fly-on-the-wall pretense here. Soon the police arrive and take the workers off to the police station as Alpert tries to film the entire episode. When Johnson is released, Alpert is there to meet him. Johnson says the police clearly want him to go back home as he walks past the trailing Alpert, his gestures apparently those of someone successfully deterred.

Alpert intervenes: "But you wanted to talk to the workers." Johnson looks back toward the camera and Alpert, speechless. Cut. We are once again talking to workers outside the factory! What we see is what Alpert participates in and relays back to us through his own visual field, the camera. Many documentarians edit out their own questions and rightfully so: they add nothing to the stories interviewees tell. But Alpert does not play the role of interviewer; he is a participant, not an observer. His work invites further investigation of the essayist tradition in documentary and of the pronounced inflections in documentary form brought about by the first person "voice" of the film-maker him/herself.[4]

Roses in December retains the fiction of the camera as non-participant or observational witness. It seeks to observe the qualities and conditions of a lived life, but its first obstacle is the very death with which it begins. The body—a term that contains the awful ambiguity of being both an active agent and an inert object, an emblem of life and evidence of death—requires reanimation if we are to engage with it. Its surface must be reinscribed with meaning, its form attached to history.

In *Roses* this reinscription attaches primarily to the *person,* Jean Donovan, who lost her life in a country whose government feels little compunction about taking it, rather than to the *persona,* "Jean Donovan," which represents the conversion of the body of the person into a transcendent, mythic image. This mythic image is apotheosized in narrative cinema as the star, that secular deity who represents an idealization of appearance—physical looks, manners, movements, ways of inhabiting space and traversing time—with which we may identify.[5] But most significantly, and paradoxically, *Roses* reincarnates Jean Donovan's body as a precarious balance of person, persona and narrative agent that cannot be any one of these possibilities entirely. The visual substance of the historical person provides the semiotic substance for a narrative character and mythic persona.[6]

Roses in December mobilizes all three axes along which the human body can be conceptualized. These axes—the term "axis" represents a geometric metaphor for what is more likely a poetic or ideological act of semiotic conceptualization—can be thought of as the substructural armature of any type of film. I envision them as extending at right angles to one another: (1) the narrative domain of motivated time and the body as causal agent, (2) the indexical domain of historical time and the body as social actor, and (3) the mythical domain of timelessness and the body as identificatory icon (along with a subordinate "primary identification" with projected images as such.)[7] A fourth domain, operative in reflexive and experimental documentaries more than in *Roses,* could be called the domain of the ironic or poetic; it could be represented as another set of the same three axes displaced from their original point of origin by the text's own distancing devices or formal strategies.[8] These axes form a conceptual ground for the structural and stylistic features that engender form, the concrete materialization of content. They constitute a pre-figuration of the physical topography of the body rather than a repertoire of styles (those follow from this initial act of conceptualization). Just as classic tropes like metaphor and irony provide a pre-figurative ground for the representation of history, so these axes offer a pre-figurative framework for the representation of the body.[9]

Consider narrative as the "x" axis, the axis of emplotment. Narrative trajectory, in its classic form, suppresses difference and effects closure. It gives resolution. Contradictions appear and ramify only to be vanquished. Identifications and references get tilted onto the moving chain of events, of actions and enigmas, that sweep (or drift) toward a conclusion.

Complex strategies of "narrative work," of rhetorical suasion and enchantment, operate to propel the story forward to its rendezvous with the end-point whose dim prospect the beginning foretold.

The "y" axis, then, is the referential axis which returns us to the historical. The historical, open-ended and contingent, lies at right angles to the closure of narrative. Narrative, as a closed system, gives the appearance of resolution to conflicts that remain unresolved in the historical domain. Indexical referentiality disrupts the hermetic seal of narrative and turns us toward the highly localized situation and practices from which a given story unfolds.

The "z" axis runs at right angles to the other two, establishing a third dimension of myth, spectacle, and identification with the "to-be-looked-atness" of the image. The "z" axis supports that form of stasis that myth and scopophilia have in common: identification eludes temporal flux, history or narrative. It tries to seize a moment and make it perpetual. When of sufficient magnitude the process becomes arresting, placing a blockage in the way of narrative or historical referentiality. It is also, of course and paradoxically, an integral part of how we experience both narrative and history. The Hollywood cinema of spectacle, the representation of women as the fetishized object of desire, and the transcendent image of the star are all important moments along this axis. This axis of identification may, as Laura Mulvey argues, threaten to arrest narrative (or expository) flow, requiring the mythic or iconic object to be motivated narratively (as show girl, for example).

These fixations of identification also run counter to the vicissitudes of history. As André Bazin notes, a living person relinquishes his/her provisional position within the historical field when made over as mythically complete, as an eternal symbol.[10] The historic congeals into the mythic and, similarly, the social actor solidifies into a specifiable type; he or she becomes a character in the sense of displaying a set of behaviors that exemplify a particular, conventionalized conception of the human.

And, to stretch the geometric metaphor a little further, texts may adopt negative as well as positive values along each axis. A given text may challenge the apparent fullness and total presence associated with positive values. The "classic" narrative; the body as icon, myth or deity; referentiality as direct, complete, one-to-one correspondence: each of these conceptions wavers as a text moves toward the other end of each axis: (1) the anti-narrative of modernism, (2) the self-referentiality of a *discours* that fabricates from language a prison-house, a signifying practice whose logic and meaning is in the play of differences it alone produces, and (3) the "figure" of dispersal that prevents a perfect overlay of person (social actor), narrative agent, and character, persona, or star. This "negative space," in fact, has become a focus of increasing interest for many film-makers with quite varied effect.[11] Negative values along each axis do not abolish patterns of interference in favor of a deconstructive monotone; these texts, too, embody palpable contradictions that engage us diversely. They also crack open the geometric metaphor by dislodging the notion of an origin or center, a zero-degree point that less experimental works posit through their reliance on the codes of realism.

Every documentary will have its own set of coordinates on these axes. In general, documentaries will give greater stress to the "y" axis of historical reference than fictive films and fictive films greater to the "x" axis of narrative emplotment. Two other films that also offer meditations on the human body help clarify the balance of emphases in *Roses*. Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* (1971), a prolonged, poetic scrutiny of cadavers in a Pittsburgh morgue, and Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1985), a formalist rendering of funeral rituals in the Indian city of Benares, both dwell primarily on a poetic reworking of the indexical link between image and referent and give virtually no sense of narrative agency. (Traces remain in *Forest of Bliss* but Gardner refuses to structure scenes in close accord with actual events and withholds subtitles to explain the conversations he carefully recorded in sync.) Brakhage succeeds in achieving a powerful meditation on the sight of the human body largely by so resolutely refusing any mythic or narrative dimension whereas Gardner, by offering traces of identificatory and narrative engagement that he refuses to sustain, conveys an exploitative or subversive attitude. (His film can be read as an exploitative use of social actors as "material" for his own poeticism[12] or as a resolute, subversive refusal to justify the ethnographic aspect of this effort by not assigning

cultural significance to events.) Brakhage withholds narrative and mythical engagement whereas Gardner only offers traces of narrative and hints of an anti-mythic de-materialization of the body. *Salvador,* discussed below, subsumes the historical person entirely within a narrative frame. *Roses* blends all three domains so that identification with a character and a sense of narrative agency impinge on the sense of poetic structure made from historical material.

Although *Roses in December* engages the domains of narrative agency and exemplary characterization, it avoids stereotypes and the problematics of male scopophilia, of either voyeurism or fetishism. Laura Mulvey and Gaylyn Studlar have argued that sadism and masochism each demand a story. But so does history.[13] Explanations always take the form of stories (as a chain of cause and effect events arranged in time), and some take on the psychic overtones that Mulvey and Studlar note. But it is more the demand for an explanation of the wanton termination of a life than the demand for a sadistic or masochistic story that governs *Roses.*

In the film, Jean Donovan's life receives a narrative coherence from acts which are described rather than enacted since this portrait of her emerges after the fact of her murder. We learn that she grows up happily, she makes friends, she enjoys herself then she changes her priorities, devotes herself to others, establishes an important love relationship, serves the poor in El Salvador and is, because of this, violated and killed by government soldiers. Home movies, snapshots, archival footage and the testimony of others must provide the narrative trajectory Donovan herself retrospectively appears to have enacted. And they do so primarily for the reason suggested by White rather than any more psychopathic one: "If every fully realized story, however we define that familiar but conceptually elusive entity, is a kind of allegory, points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to *moralize* the events of which it treats."[14]

Jean Donovan as a baby, with her brother

Roses in December most forcefully announces its intent to speak about the historical world in its opening scene of news footage recording the discovery of the gravesite and the disinterment of the four bodies. Its voice-over commentator (John Houseman) informs us that the film will speak about Jean Donovan, the person, who died in El Salvador for reasons that reside partially in her own past and partially in the history of that nation—in the collision between individual altruism and state authoritarianism.

Historical realism—an effect of the indexical quality of the photographic image and conventions of documentary form—finds its most forceful expression in the opening newsreel footage that begins the film. The clinical nature of the camera's gaze, or stare, is profoundly disconcerting. The sight of bodies pulled out of their grave by ropes only to flop inertly on the dusty ground, the physical residue of what had been a human life, approaches the unwatchable. Such images testify to the problematics of the "professional gaze."[15] What ethical (or political) perspective authorizes such a gaze? As Vivian Sobchack notes, "The professional gaze is marked by ethical ambiguity, by technical and machine-like competence in the face of an event which seems to call for further and human response. . . . The concern for getting a clear and unobstructed image, and the belief that it is possible to strip that image, that representation, of human bias and perspective and ethicality so that it is 'objective,' indelibly marks the inscriptions of the professional gaze with their own problematic ethical perspective in the face of both human mortality and visual taboo."[16]

Roses in December refuses to endorse the professional gaze, however, even though it repeats this newsreel footage several times.

Instead, it offers a supplemental, moral response that fuses fact and value, body and meaning, that heals the breach between self and other opened by clinical professionalism or voyeurism. The elegiac structure of *Roses* restores dignity to the life so profoundly negated in the newsreel footage; it situates the person as an historical agent without transposing her into a function of imaginary identifications alone. Historical placement and contingency remain as active forces.

Roses also approaches without fully adopting the strategy of a controlling voice that can bring order to the conflicting voices held within the text. This strategy of containment is what gives a film like *Citizen Kane* only the appearance of disorder since the disparate testimonies and evidence are finally held in place by the narrating agency of the film itself, by "Orson Welles," the *auteur*. *Roses in December* incorporates a number of voices without fully assimilating them to a meaning or theme. Even John Houseman's voice-over commentary is held to a minimum and does not provide an ironic, riddle-solving equivalent to Welles's final tracking shot into the emblem of "Rosebud" as it goes up in flames.

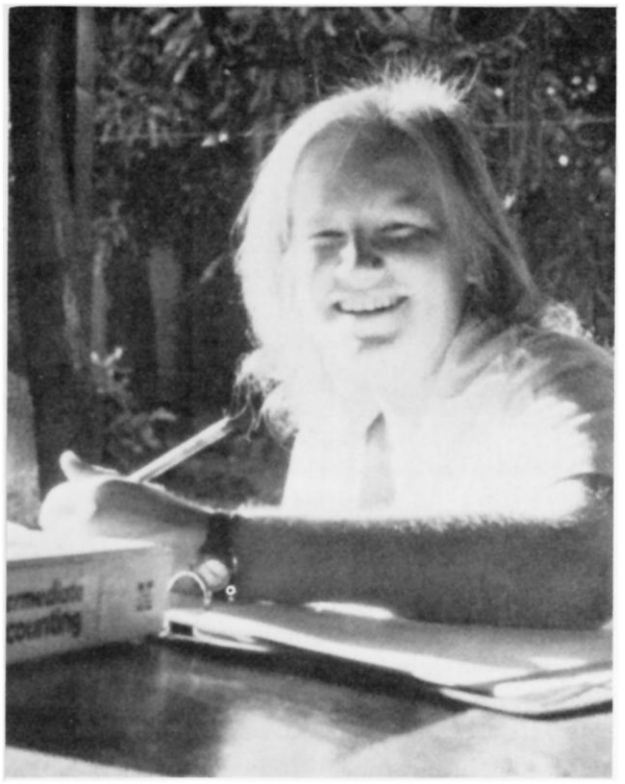
A heterogeneous mix of authorized voices inform the film and destabilize the impression of a unified fictive space. Donovan's letters, read by her brother, on camera, and diary passages, read by Susan Stevens in voice-over; home movies of Jean horseback riding, presented in slow-motion with voice-over commentary by her riding instructor; the testimony of her lover, her friends and parents about her personality and outlook; contextualizing passages that allude to the history of military repression and violence in El Salvador through the use of stock footage and material shot for the film, together with press interviews or public testimony by key U.S. officials like then Secretary of State Alexander Haig or Ambassador to the U.N. Jean Kirkpatrick—all these strands contribute to a plane of logical ordering without achieving a full sense of closure. Kirkpatrick's claim (that the four women were not "just nuns" but "political activists"—as though this, if true, would be reason enough for summary execution) exerts the kind of undertow that interviews in many of Emile de Antonio's film do. The remark's validity cannot be upheld within the framework that surrounds it; it both

Jean Donovan horseback riding

introduces and nullifies a new conceptual frame by exposing its grotesque, underlying logic.

The radical force of Fredric Jameson's assertion about the nature of history is what this text *figures,* in an inescapably partial way, as a gap between the discourse of governmental figures and the events they try to rationalize away: "History is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise. . . . History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis."[17] An excess remains.

Part of that excess is the question of interior subjectivity that *Roses in December* opens up only to leave incomplete. Narrative fiction can answer more fully to the question of what it feels like to occupy a given body, to present a certain persona, to walk the divide between that moment of myth or spectacle which depends on the physical presentation of an image of the self and those moments of narrative which rely on the actions of a character. The incarnation of characters by people (social actors) holds us to the surface of subjectivity in that interior states must be displayed on the skin of the actor. But, like the novel, the cinema also has means of engendering subjective states that are more interior. The full weight of the cinematic apparatus can be brought to bear in the constitution of an arresting subjectivity. (Flashbacks, memories, subjective points of view, music, sound effects—these devices and others can be made to serve the goal of subjectivity.) As Barry King notes, "The projection of interiority becomes less and less the provenance of the actor and more and more a property emerging from directorial or editorial decision. . . . While film increases the centrality of the actor in the process of signification, the formative capacity



Jean Donovan doing bookkeeping for the mission team. ROSES IN DECEMBER *is available in film and videocassette form from First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014.*

of the medium can equally confine the actor more and more to being a bearer of effects that he or she does not or cannot originate."[18]

One formidable aspect of the generation of an imaginary interiority by the cinematic apparatus occurs in the extrafilmic but cinematic discourse about stars. This discourse—in the form of fan magazines, gossip columns, press releases, "as told to" biographies and so on—lends an overarching unity to the disparate roles a star may play by stressing the characterological consistency of the star him/herself. Ironically, documentaries that stress the "z" domain of the mythic cannot rely on such a discourse for assistance (unless it is a documentary about a star or similar cultural hero). They may recruit the extrafilmic or noncinematic discourse that surrounds people whose historical role receives public attention, but, even more suggestively, such documentaries generate their own discourse about the person in order to lend greater coherence to the character they construct.

A film like *Roses,* then, incorporates two elements that are usually separated between the classic Hollywood film and its supporting apparatus. On the one hand, it re-presents the codes of social *performance* whereby a person portrays him/herself to others, codes closely allied to realist acting codes. And on the other hand, the film generates *testimony* about the characterological dimensions of this social performance, or life. Testimony recruited to the film and designed to produce a sense of complex, individuated character as it emerges in relation to history contrasts with testimony external to fiction films but still generated within the cinematic apparatus. In the latter case such testimony produces the myth-like figures of identification (and of voyeuristic, fetishistic, or masochistic fascination) through the circulation of gossip or lore and through the encouragement of such practices as imitation and emulation, the mimicking of dress, gesture, and speech. (*Roses* also utilizes a lush, carefully lit and composed *mise-en-scène* for many of its interviews with witnesses, a strategy that underlines the narrative-like fabrication of a character without ever rupturing the linkage of this process to the historical figure of Jean Donovan.)

Roses in December restores a sense of complex character to the body of Jean Donovan without recourse to ahistorical modes of mythic formulation. Donovan's life is neither reenacted (through the performance of another) nor apotheosized (through its removal from history). The interpretative field of testimony offered by other social actors in *Roses* fractures the imaginary unity of character. The subject's eccentric identity outside itself, in the historical surround, remains evident throughout.

Documentary has traditionally taken an ambivalent position regarding interior states of mind—particularly in its *cinéma vérité* mode where the outer surface of the body, including utterances, takes on the charged importance of a naturalism—but one of the recurring themes in recent works like *Roses* is their effort to give structure to interiority. *Roses in December,* in sharp contrast to the feature-length compilation of four sets of interviews over 21 years in *28 Up* (Michael Apted, 1985), does not attempt to elaborate its characters by bullying them. Instead it moves toward a more thoroughly subjective invocation of interiority that engages us by means of processes of identification.

Specifically, *Roses* offers an imaginative reconstruction of Jean Donovan's last hours in El Salvador—from her drive to the airport to pick up the other nuns through their detention at a roadblock, their abduction, sexual violation, and cold-blooded execution. It is all shot in tinted black-and-white and uses dramatic camera angles to convey a foreboding tension. The sequence relies more heavily on the cinematic apparatus to achieve the markings of interiority than on the performance of actors to re-present the four murdered women. Indeed, no-body can replace the bodies that have been historically extinguished. We never see any individuated characters or the faces of any actors. The only sign of human agency that we see during this entire sequence, in fact, is a single hand on the steering wheel of a van. Narrative action takes place with only minimal attachment to acting or performance. The one glimpse of the hand is little more than a physical marker of the place of narrative agency. The killers are strongly de-individuated; they are given no close-ups, no dialogue, no physical movements that can be read as signs of expressivity. They are, indeed, not visible at all and their implied presence only serves to abolish the problematics of an event that would seem to propel itself.

A performance as such would be highly troubling, presenting the dilemma of four bodies too many. Fictive performance would depart from the indexical compact that grounds the reception of documentary. These almost entirely invisible actors are little more than what Heath has called "animated entities" in order to stress the lack of individuation that can be a legitimate feature of the narrative agent/actor as such. This sequence offers a subjective vision of how specific, historical individuals confronted the moment of their own death as it delivers the body of Jean Donovan to that site at which the film begins and to which meaning must be assigned.

This sequence contrasts instructively with a parallel one in *Salvador,* Oliver Stone's dramatic depiction of recent Salvadorean history as witnessed by an American journalist played by James Woods. Woods's character, like Thompson in *Citizen Kane,* allows for a *You Are There*–like recreation of historical events. Archbishop Romero's assassination, for example, occurs just after Woods and his Salvadorean

Jean Donovan at the wheel of the mission van

girlfriend take communion. He becomes an eyewitness to the mass mayhem that ensues when government troops attack the mourners at Romero's funeral service, and he introduces us to the liberal but weak-willed American ambassador who, at the decisive moment, capitulates to his advisors and gives the Salvadorean military access to the American matériel they need to defeat the revolutionaries' major initiative.

Among Woods's acquaintances is a plucky young woman who works with the poor and disabled. She remains rather peripheral to the film's development until, as with other characters we've met, the film shifts away from Woods to follow her momentarily. The moment chosen, of course, is a fateful one. It begins with her driving to the airport, continues as she and the three nuns leave and concludes with their brutal rape and murder by soldiers in civilian dress. In the next scene (but how much later we do not know), their grave site is discovered, the ambassador arrives, gives instructions and expresses outrage—suspending the aid he will later restore. The bodies are pulled from their common grave with ropes, and James Woods arrives to cradle the young woman's dead body and mourn her loss.

The sequence has an uncanny effect, partly because it is unanticipated (we have only minimal clues that this character represents Jean Donovan) and partly because the event, particularly the discovery and disinterment, is rendered with camera shots and dialogue strikingly similar to the archival news footage in *Roses.* Despite this similarity, though, the effect is markedly different.

In *Salvador,* the character's death works mainly to tell us something about the narrative, particularly about the character of the protag-

SALVADOR: *subordinating characters to narrative*

onist—his compassion and decency despite appearances and the immoral nature of those around him. "Cathy," the Jean Donovan character, functions as a donor, lending complexity to the hero's character by sharpening the moral contrast between him and the Salvadorean government. Stone underscores this latter point by depicting the rape extensively. In *Roses* it is only mentioned verbally. Stone goes so far as to show the blouse being ripped from one of the women in a conveniently placed beam of light. The sight of her exposed breast shocks and distracts. It raises enormously disturbing issues about the film's voyeurism and sensationalism. It displaces the shock in *Roses in December* when we see four dead bodies pulled from the ground to a voyeuristic and sadistic register prey to all those criticisms of the "to-be-looked-atness" of female characters so astutely avoided by *Roses.*

This sequence in *Salvador* also "authenticates" the narrative by attaching it to (a recreation of) an historical event. In *Roses,* Jean Donovan's death serves mainly as the stimulus for the film to tell us something about this person, particularly about the quality of her life and the reasons for her murder. The emphasis becomes what the film can tell us about a life, rather than what a life can tell us about the film. In *Salvador,* the event becomes exemplary of the fictional universe and its characters; it remains contained within a diegetic frame it only exceeds metaphorically (being *like* real death, *like* the real death of Jean Donovan) rather than footage of an actual death. The film can move forward along its narrative axis without pause to contemplate the question to which *Roses* devotes itself. It is just another fictional death—powerful in its effect, informative in its placement, disturbing in its representation, but fundamentally removed from the historical realm to which it metaphorically alludes.[19]

The representation of the human body in documentary requires placement in the relation to narrative character, mythic icon and *social* agent. The attempt to construct an interior meaning and subjective experience propels *Roses* toward the imaginary coherence of actual person and fictitious character in the image of the icon, and yet *Roses* also insists on the dispersal of that very coherence. For the documentary film, the person acts as an agent in history, not narrative, no matter how persistently we give meaning to the former by means of the latter. The figuration of this relationship represents a crisis moment in documentary. The full, ideological coherence of narrative may impose itself and cast the person into the imaginary mold of the narrative character; the cinematic apparatus for the engenderment of the actor-as-star may dissolve the linkage between the person and the plane of history, or the raw, inchoate flux of history may overwhelm the textual system and subsume the person into the senseless swirl of the anecdotal and episodic.

Roses in December maintains a precarious balance. Jean Donovan takes on the attributes of character (here clustered around the journey as spiritual odyssey, hazardous service to the poor as a potential pathway to martyrdom, and the attendant rituals of both witness and self-discovery) and of mythic icon (here associated with qualities of dedication, devotion, and grace), but she also remains situated as an agent within the historical arena to which the stickiness of the film's indexical sounds and images constantly return us. The result undermines the imaginary solidity of the fictive and the mythic and confirms the necessary alliance between contradiction and closure in narrative, between fullness and the imaginary in myth. A resistance occurs. Tensions prevail that make the very alignment of person/character/icon seem a violation of the body of the social actor. Those transgressive moments of identification and those fetishistic or voyeuristic moments of scopophilic desire carry the potential for a disruption and stoppage of temporal flow. They

become all the more transgressive of an historical field that refuses all attempts to arrest it, however momentarily.

The recovery of the seven bodies from the space shuttle *Challenger* represented an acute embarrassment. The apparently total vaporization of their bodies called forth prodigious acts of commemoration and myth-making. Once enacted, such myths have no further need of physical bodies, flesh and blood limited by time and place, character and subjectivity, factual achievements and the witness of others.[20] Whereas it was the return of the historical body of Jesus that signalled his status as the Christ, son of God, the return of these seven bodies signalled their status as all-too-human flesh, constrained by the vicissitudes of time rather than transcendent to it. By contrast, the recovery of the body of Jean Donovan did not represent embarrassment, save for her murderers, but indictment. The recovery of all four bodies inaugurated a process of moral, legal, and political judgment which it is the function of this complex documentary amalgam of history, myth, and narrative to render. If a political unconscious flows through the text of *Roses in December* it is one that evokes, in the story of a single life, an affirmation of the utopian impulse that, neither imaginary nor mythical, locates itself in the realm of history itself.[32]

NOTES

1. A number of other films have played an important part in formulating these questions. They include: *Hard Metals Disease,* a video documentary by Jon Alpert (1981?), *Salvador* (Oliver Stone, 1986), *Frank: A Vietnam Veteran* (Frank Simon and Vince Canzoneri, 1981), *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Susana Munoz, Lourdes Portillo, 1985), *Witness to War* (Deborah Schaeffer, 1985), *A Man Marked to Die: Twenty Years Later* (Eduardo Coutinho, 1984). Although a television movie has been produced that also deals with Jean Donovan's life and murder, and a book written about her as well, I have not had an opportunity to review these two texts and must defer remarks about them to another time.

2. I trace four major documentary structures in relation to the voice of the film-maker in my "The Voice of Documentary," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 36, no. 3 (Spring 1983), also in *Movies and Methods, Vol. II.* In many ways, the present article is a continuation of the previous one, taking up the question of the body. The emphasis here is not on the film-maker's body, however. Their focus would direct us toward the personal essay, diary, and a number of experimental forms. I hope to explore this area in a future essay.

3. Rubbo's films for the NFB, such as *Waiting for Fidel* and *Sad Song of Yellow Skin,* give prominence to his own role as a curious, slightly innocent investigator with whom the audience is invited to identify at the same time as it is apprised of the investigator's own limitations, foibles or biases. Bonnie Klein adopts a fairly similar position in her NFB documentary on pornography, *Not a Love Story.*

4. Some possibilities of a first-person voice in documentary are explored by Julianne Burton in her "Democratizing Documentary: Modes of Address in the Latin American Cinema, 1958-1972," in Thomas Waugh, editor, *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984).

5. See Stephen Heath's essay, "Body, Voice," in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) for a full discussion of the differences among person, actor, agent, character, star, and "figure," Heath's term for a way of representing the linkages among the axes of history, narrative, and myth such that an instability results. Another useful discussion of these terms occurs in Barry King, "Articulating Stardom," *Screen* vol. 26, no. 5 (September-October 1985).

6. The distinction between substance as the material facticity of something and sub-stance as the support for something derives from Kenneth Burke by way of Frank Lentricchia (in *Criticism and Social Change,* p. 74). Similar concepts of "the metaphor that's meant" from Gregory Bateson and of "second-order systems" in my *Ideology and the Image* also refer to this destabilization of self-evident presence into contextually dependent paradoxes that are resolvable only within a dialectical frame.

7. The indexical domain here subsumes what I have elsewhere, particularly in *Ideology and the Image,* referred to as exposition. Both the indexical image and expository discourse escape the illusionism of narrative that masks its production. They attest to their own status as discourse, but they also refer to a realm beyond their own frame. And whereas exposition can occur in fictive texts (a voice-over narration is a prime example), the indexical, wherever it occurs, directs our attention not only to itself as a representation but also, by dint of its resemblance, to that which it represents.

8. It is also possible to consider these four axes in relation to the four predominant tropes of rhetoric. In this case, the historical would correspond to metonomy, narrative to metaphor, the mythic to synecdoche, and the ironic to irony. See Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), especially pp. xi-x and pp. 31-38.

9. After beginning to conceptualize these three axes, their parallelism with Hayden White's notion of pre-figuration in historical writing became more clear, less in terms of the specific categories, which differ in accordance with the difference between 19th-century historiography and documentary film-making today, but more in terms of the notion of the realm of pre-figuration as such. Matters of style and form remain to be decided after a text's placement in relation to the axes has been considered. No conscious act is implied on the part of the film-maker, but rather the same kind of "poetic act" that White attributes to historians when they position themselves, pre-figuratively, within the possibilities of a linguistic field. His definition of written history requires only slight modification to be brought to bear on documentary: ". . . a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them* [italics his]" (*Metahistory,* p. 2). This last phrase also leads White to add a footnote over a page long in which he takes up the vexing issue of realism. White's stress on the artistic elements of realist historiography also parallels my concern here with the narrative and mythic elements of documentary over the indexical or historical elements of fiction.

10. See André Bazin, "The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods,* Vol. II, pp. 29-40.

11. Two excellent, feminist examples of such "negative explorations" are Kay Armatage's *Speak Body* (1979) and Brenda Longfellow's *The Two Marilyn's* (1987). Armatage presents women's voices off-screen while we see fragments of their bodies and hear about their personal experiences with abortion. Longfellow ponders the cultural, masculinist uses of the bodies of "our Marilyn," Mar-

ilyn Bell, a Canadian who was the first person to swim across Lake Ontario, and "their Marilyn," Marilyn Monroe, whose body represented an entirely different set of attitudes and assumptions. The film utilizes archival footage and reenactment to invert the normal dramatic curve—stressing the middle of Bell's swim over her setting out or arrival—and to fracture the mythic meanings that have settled around each of these two Marilyns.

12. If read as exploitative, Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* contrasts fascinatingly with the highly moralistic *Not a Love Story.* If *Not a Love Story* is an ethnographic pornography, *Forest of Bliss* is a pornographic ethnography.

13. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," both in *Movies and Methods,* vol. II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in W. J. T. Mitchell, *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

14. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity," pp. 14–15.

15. Vivian Sobchack in "Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation and Documentary," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Fall 1984), describes six different visual forms in which the encounter of film-maker and death or dying can be registered, each bearing a distinct set of ethical implications. The "professional gaze" is one of these.

16. Sobchack, "Inscribing Ethical Space," p. 298. See also Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) which argues that the "professional" or "objective" code of reportage derives, ironically, from a loss of faith in the givenness of the world in the post-World War I environment. If the world is open to manipulation better to remain apart from it and report "the facts" dissociated from values; objectivity provides an internal, evaluative code of professional conduct independent of the values that can be assigned to the facts presented.

17. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious,* pp. 35, 102.

18. Barry King, "Articulating Stardom," p. 45.

19. Vivian Sobchack makes a similar distinction in her own description of the representation of death in cinema: "Thus, when death is represented as fictive rather than real, when its signs are structured and stressed so as to function iconically and symbolically, it is understood that only the *simulacrum* of a visual taboo is being violated. However, when death is represented as real, when its signs are structured and inflected so as to function indexically, a visual taboo is violated and the representation must find ways to justify the violation." "Inscribing Ethical Space," p. 291. This is precisely the strategy of *Roses:* to offer complex justification for the sight with which it begins, the disinterment of the four bodies.

20. In contrast to the front-page news of the disaster itself, for example, the shipment of the recovered remains to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware for "final treatment in accordance with the families' wishes" became a small, two-paragraph item buried on a back page of the April 25, 1986, *New York Times.*

I wish to thank Julianne Burton, Vivian Sobchack and Michael Renov for numerous, extremely valuable comments and suggestions. An earlier reflection on some of the issues presented in this essay appears in another essay, "Questions of Magnitude," in John Corner, ed., *Documentary and Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986).

MICHAEL RENOV

Newsreel: Old and New—Towards An Historical Profile

Our films remind some people of battle footage: grainy, camera weaving around trying to get the material and still not get beaten/trapped. Well, we and many others, are at war. We not only document that war, but try to find ways to bring that war to places which have managed so far to buy themselves isolation from it. . . . Our propaganda is one of confrontation. Using film—using our voices with and after films—using our bodies with and without camera—to provoke confrontation. . . . Therefore we keep moving. We keep hacking out films, as quickly as we can, in whatever way we can.

—Robert Kramer, New York Newsreel, 1968[1]

Documentary remains the major form of political filmmaking in this country. It has always been and probably will be in the forseeable future. And yet, there has been very, very little discussion of how documentary films actually function. The political efficacy of documentary is derived from the relationship of the audience to the film—not the relationship of the filmmaker to the subject.

—Larry Daressa, California Newsreel, 1983[2]

December 1987 will mark the twenty-year anniversary of the formation of Newsreel, a radical film-making collective conceived during the last flush of New Left activism. Once boasting offices in New York, San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, and Atlanta, Newsreel now survives in two versions: California Newsreel, San Francisco, producers and distributors of films about the workplace as well as South Africa and apartheid, with a new focus on media education (educating Americans *about* rather than *through* media); and Third World Newsreel, New York, vortex of film and video activities intended as the cultural interventions of the disenfranchised. In the following pages, I hope to suggest areas of conceptual as well as functional continuity and discontinuity between the two extant Newsreel organizations, as well as between the present enterprises and

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COLUMBIA REVOLT *(1968): one of Newsreel's first films*

their Newsreel predecessors. In doing so, I seek to draw attention both to the achievements of a generation of American film activists and to the necessarily altered requirements for survival for politically committed documentarists in the late eighties. A historical profile of this sort can only point to a few of the most dramatic tendencies across decades of activity; this account will be supplemented by the soon-to-be updated Third World Newsreel catalogue featuring descriptions of the Newsreel films in circulation (in addition to the hundred or so independently produced films and tapes they distribute) and by more in-depth accounts of the Newsreel infrastructure and output during its several phases.[3]

NEWSREEL PRE-HISTORY

The counterculture of the New Left tended toward negation, the issuing of shocks against presumed middle-class sensibilities, all the while reinforcing oppositional ties. Consequently, one must look elsewhere than to the culture of the American Left of the thirties for radical antecedents, perhaps to the surrealist or constructivist positions earlier in the century. If one may judge from the rhetoric of first-generation Newsreelers such as Robert Kramer, it is the utopian socialism of the immediately post-revolutionary Soviet Union that resonates most deeply with the cultural radicalism of the New Left, not the populist humanism of the American thirties.

It is the combination of youthfulness, enthusiasm, and volatility that links the work and writing of Dziga Vertov with the first wave of Newsreel practitioners. Both were dedicated to the concept of a continuing revolution and the potential of the cinema to mobilize a shared political identity necessary for broad-based social change. What separates the two and forces us to pose them in dialectical tension are their respective relations to state power and to technology. Vertov and his comrades worked at the cutting edge of a state-run revolution. Newsreel was a manifestation of the counterculture, defining itself always in opposition to the dominant, generating and encouraging resistance to the authority of the prevailing system of social, political and economic relations.[4]

Vertov, trained as were so many other Soviet film artists for a scientific vocation, envisioned cinema as a technological vehicle for extending human powers of observation and cognition. His *kinoki* were labelled as "pilots" or "engineers" whose machine eye and radio ear could transform history. A child of his time, Vertov praised the beauty and perfection of the mechanical world and of chemical processes as the triumphant extension of natural forces.

A half-century later, the relationship of New Left media activists to technology was chiefly one of negation. Early Newsreelers harbored little hope of appropriating or re-routing channels of communication to further their political

goals. ("None of us are old enough to have any illusions about infiltrating the major media to reach mass consciousness and change it—we grew up on TV and fifties Hollywood."[5]). Unlike Vertov and his *kinoki,* or even the American Old Left, the founders of Newsreel in late 1967 could claim no institutional or mass-based source of support. Rather, as suggested earlier, mass base had become mass culture; party was replaced by a constituency-in-media. And yet, as with Vertov, there was within the early Newsreel movement a feverish impulse toward an elemental reconstruction for its audience—if not of perception, at least of consciousness. These radical cineasts were inspired by the enforced aesthetic privations of true guerrilla footage, documents of forces fighting wars of liberation in Vietnam, Africa, or Latin America, or by the pre-industrialized methods of the American underground film, which also offered refuge from the seamless, ideologically complicit products of the culture industry.

There is a further point of historical tangency between early Newsreel and Vertov's efforts in the pre-dawn of radical cinema. Just as the Soviet agit-trains, armed with camera equipment, film lab and projector, traversed the land from 1919 to 1921 helping to forge a nascent cultural identity, so too did early Newsreelers mobilize their own community outreach program. Recent Academy Award recipient Deborah Schaffer (*Witness to War,* 1985) has spoken of the methods of distribution and exhibition in the Ann Arbor, Michigan chapter of Newsreel in 1969–70:

> We had two motorcycles and we put this box on the back of the motorcycle to hold the projector. We'd go off on motorcycles with the projector and films. We would show them in dormitories, churches, people's living rooms, union halls, high school auditoriums.[6]

Vertov and his New Left cousins shared the zeal and inventiveness of the bricoleur-evangelist.

The reconstruction of consciousness for the Newsreel audience was to be achieved by a willed abdication from the standards of quality or craft; the intention was a return to an essential cinema dedicated to the requirements of building an adversarial culture. The simplicity of the appellation "Newsreel" figures a desire for a fundamental reinscription of values and practices. The unstinting revisionism which underlies this naming and its return to the blank slate of historical representation is both an act of youthful bravery and of a willing forgetfulness which breaks ties with a set of complex histories. The popular frontism of the American Left in the late 1930s and early 1940s was rooted in a hope of base-building and eventual unification while the political radicalisms of the late 1960s implied a contrary motive—the intensification of social contradiction to the point of rupture. For while the founding membership of Newsreel in New York included a core of veterans of mid-sixties community-organizing campaigns, the organization was forged in a moment of communal anger and indignation following the October 1967 March on the Pentagon. The agenda for a grass-roots, participatory democracy was buckling under the weight of a growing militancy.[7]

The altered agenda of an increasingly apocalyptic moment is expressed quite succinctly in *Garbage* (Newsreel, 1968), a film which examines a planned provocation by the members of a New York anarchist group calling itself "Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers." During a prolonged strike of garbage collection workers, the Motherfuckers devise a plan to bring rotting garbage to the bastions of high culture and political power. They therefore dump enormous heaps of trash at the entranceways of Lincoln Center, home of the Metropolitan Opera and New York Philharmonic Symphony. As footage of this confrontation unspools, one demonstrator observes in voice-over that the difference between the Old Left and the New is expressed by their differing approaches to problems—the former sought to solve them, the latter to intensify them.

INSTITUTIONAL TIES—THE MYTH OF CREATION

As interviews with early New York Newsreel members indicate, the first generation of this radical film-making group represented a convergence of disparate impulses and constituencies.[8] There were the former SDS activists whose political sensibilities had been forged through a decade of community-based activism and programmatic wrangling. Of this number, Robert Kramer and Norm Fruchter, with his ties to such influential journals as *Studies on the Left* and *New Left Review,* remain the prototypes. These were the ideologues, the political

"heavies" whose Movement credentials and rhetorical skills were capable of intimidating opposition in mass meetings. In addition, there were the "underground" film-makers whose concerns were loosely tied to notions of alternative art-making and self-expression, products of the boom period of the New American Cinema when the Brakhages and the Baillies commanded a sizable audience in the museums and on the campuses. The former Newsreel faction was likely to give priority to the construction of correct political positions expressed in filmic terms while the latter tendency defined itself more directly in terms of its craft, guided by political concerns but not subsumed by them. This is, of course, a rough approximation or profile of some forty or fifty people whose idiosyncracies tended to obscure any such general tendencies.[9]

There is a larger and quite striking commonality decipherable, however; neither faction could claim for itself an organized or structurally coherent base of support—in short, an audience. Neither the Marxists nor the underground film-makers could presume to know their constituencies in any but the most abstract terms, the political activists because the Movement was undergoing a painful process of fragmentation typified by the SDS splits while the film artisans were rooted in a tradition of expressivity which valued the isolation of the artist within the hegemony of mass culture. The very values which united every Newsreel audience or potential audience were based on a fundamental negation of institutionalized frameworks (alienation from accepted social and political forms, cynicism toward the trade unionism that had been the bastion of the Old Left, a preference for vaguely articulated rather than explicit associations). A politically inflected cultural group like Newsreel, in bearing what Bill Nichols has characterized as a barometric relationship to the Left,[10] could only reproduce the soft boundaries and conceptual dissonance of late sixties political dissent typified by the rainbow of orientations and agendas that combined to protest the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention—from the Dave Dellinger-style anti-war pacifists to the anarchic Yippie contingent.

Despite the conceptual pluralism of Newsreel's position in the early years, we can discern certain frequently unstated premises of the organization. From an interview with a range of Newsreelers published in a 1968 *Film Quarterly,*

The Newsreel opening title

Marilyn Buck and Karen Ross gave voice to the mythic origins of the collective: "And all the TV channels and American films speak from the same mouth of control and power. We looked around . . . and Newsreel was conceived and born."[11] There is the suggestion of a kind of autochthony here, of a cleansing oracle arisen from within the belly of the mass-cultural beast. The two films which catapulted Newsreel to success in countercultural terms (*Columbia Revolt, Black Panther*—both 1968) offer further evidence of such a mythos of spontaneous generation. The films share an aura of revolutionary romanticism, offering direct contact with what appeared at the time to be the most advanced elements of the struggle—in short, news from the front. The Panther film, alternately titled *Off the Pig* (a phrase hypnotically chanted by a phalanx of Panthers during a demonstration at the Alameda County Courthouse), brought the words and images of Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale to Movement audiences everywhere. More importantly, by its *mise-en-scène* and incantatory music track accompanying bereted and leather-jacketed Panthers-in-training, the film manages to suggest a great deal more than it can show. "No more brothers in jail/The pigs are gonna catch hell" sing the militant brothers and sisters while Cleaver speaks of the bald-headed businessmen in the Chamber of Commerce whose exploitation will be countered by mass insurgency as soon as the rest of America catches on (which Cleaver assures us will be very soon). Here is a mixture of buoyant militancy and a political optimism which is well nigh infectious—or would have been for a sympathetic 1968 audience. In

any case, hundreds of prints sold in a matter of months.

As for *Columbia Revolt,* one need only consult the published responses of student audiences to be found in the underground press of the day. According to an October 1969 account appearing in *Rat,* a New York-based organ of the radical counterculture, *Revolt* was responsible for an incendiary outburst at a college campus in Buffalo: "At the end of the second film, with no discussion, five hundred members of the audience arose and made their way to the University ROTC building [the Reserve Officer Training Corps, target of much campus protest during the Vietnam War]. They proceeded to smash windows, tear up furniture and destroy machines until the office was a total wreck; and then they burned the remaining paper and flammable parts of the structure to charcoal."[12] What the Buffalo student body had observed (and the apocryphal nature of the tale is no hindrance to a discussion of mythic contours) was the vanguard action of their Ivy League cousins, a model of energetic but sustained resistance to malign authority. The analysis contained in *Columbia Revolt* is muted in comparison to the spectacle of solidarity and community it offers. The New Age marriage rites of two students, the support marches of sympathetic faculty members, the pitch-and-catch of food stuffs holding intact the supply lines which, like the Ho Chi Minh Trail, meant sustenance for the guerrillas under siege—all these depictions of newly conceived social relations live on long after the immediate gymnasium construction issue is forgotten.

The efforts of the early Newsreel collectives aimed to inform and inspire their Movement audiences, with the balance between the two functions always in question. While a pre-Newsreel film like *Troublemakers* (1966), which follows the struggles of a community organizing group in a black neighborhood in Newark before the riots (examining the project's achievements and defeats), explores the contradictions inherent in grass-roots political activism, the post-'68 Newsreel film was likely to stress action and elicit engaged (if not educated) response. In a pronouncement that echoes the Surrealist position of the 1920s, Robert Kramer outlined the Newsreel program circa 1968: "We strive for confrontation, we prefer disgust/violent disagreement/painful recognition/jolts—all these to slow liberal head-nodding and general wonderment at the complexity of these times and their being out of joint."[13]

Given the avowedly confrontational status of the work, the emphasis upon a collective scheme of organization and production ("Newsreel is a collective rather than a cooperative; we are not together merely to help each other out as filmmakers but we are working together for a common purpose"),[14] what can be said about the precise division of labor of the groups in question and the material conditions of production? As every Marxist knows, consciousness does not anticipate productive relations but is conditioned and determined by them. But a major philosopher of the New Left like Herbert Marcuse was quite willing to theorize (in *An Essay on Liberation,* 1969) that, in a stage of advanced capitalism, imagination could show reason the way. Artists and freethinkers could reshape the horizons of a society soured and and desensitized by an overrationalized ethos of thought and action. As a loosely-bound group of like-minded cultural interventionists, Newsreel was the ideal manifestation of this New Age dogma.

Decision-making and the setting of policy were matters of some contestation given the lack of clear lines of authority and the diverse backgrounds of the participants. At a time that felt like a crisis period, specific goals (even ill-defined ones like "stop the war") offered sufficient binding power to keep the wheels turning and the Movement audience served. Those who, like Norm Fruchter, were accustomed to a greater precision of shared principles and a more disciplined group dynamic found the Newsreel experience a trying one. "I was . . .

COLUMBIA REVOLT

more of a Marxist, I think, than a lot of people in Newsreel," says Fruchter, "and so I was both interested in those congeries of different folks, and at the same time skeptical about whether we were going to hold together. The energy was awesome."[15]

So far as the mechanism for production decisions was concerned, the pattern was erratic at best. The most fundamental decisions always surrounded the initial question—what films should be made. But a second question—how to finance a given project—often proved determinant. Films could be made if there were those within the collective who could manage to make them by whatever means might present themselves. If the final result was unacceptable to the group, the film could not receive the "Newsreel" imprimatur. Several funding routes seem to have recurred in the early days. There was a core elite within the New York collective who matched the profile of the SDS leadership throughout the sixties—college-educated white males, verbal, assertive, confident, with access to funding sources both personal and institutional. Robert Kramer and Robert Machover could call upon family resources to finance projects. (Indeed, this pattern is a time-honored one in American Left circles, most recently exemplified by Haskell Wexler's anti-Contra feature, *Latino*—bankrolled in part by his mother.) The Fruchters, Kramers, and Machovers of Newsreel were the bright and persuasive young men who could function within the world of capital, either by virtue of birthright or by acquired expertise. Fruchter, for example, was well-suited for fundraising given his scholarly and literary credentials (as a published novelist) and his first-hand experience with Left funding networks. Fruchter has estimated that he succeeded in raising more money for *Troublemakers,* his film about the Newark Community Union Project, than had the Project itself over its several year lifespan. There were simmering animosities over this relative monopoly of capital-access, rooted as it was in class background. Furthermore, this same group of men (who were a key faction of the New York collective's coordinating committee) possessed far greater technical skills and experience; Fruchter, Kramer and Machover had formed Blue Van Films several years before.

A second faction consisted of yet another group of white males who, though less likely candidates for institutional support, were well under way as independent film-makers. By 1968, Marvin Fishman and Allan Siegel had both organized film-making workshops at the Free University in New York and were able to translate their expertise into Newsreel product. At the moment of Newsreel's formation in December 1967, it was decided that a film was needed to chronicle the October 1967 March on the Pentagon; Fishman was farthest along with a personal project along those lines. Newsreel #1 (1968), entitled *No Game,* was the result, despite the fact that the film bears only a passing resemblance to the "Newsreel style" familiar from the later works—scenes of conflict; lively, non-synch music interspersed with multiple voice-over narrations from impassioned participants. There were concerted efforts made to disseminate the technical skills, but the difficulties were more deeply embedded than these well-intentioned attempts could hope to rectify. Women and minorities—after lifetimes of limited access to resources, possessing severely stunted self-images as producers of culture—were incapable of closing the gap overnight. Frustration and unspoken critiques festered beneath the surface of the organization.

And yet a necessary pragmatism reigned. In the words of Allan Siegel: "It was the kind of thing that if you came up with the money to do it [make a film], well then, you could do it. You made a film. I always used to stash myself away someplace and make things out of nothing. So I kept turning things out . . ."[6] Power and status were thus linked to the ability to produce despite the unequal distribution of the requisite tools for the task. In his discussion of Newsreel's collective process in the early days, Norm Fruchter recalls the inequities with some regret:

> Your participation depended on having another means to finance yourself. There was a group of people who worked and therefore could never stay up all night . . . and couldn't shoot certain sequences . . . And there were a lot of arguments about the contradictions of being in, not a rich person's organization, but certainly an organization which required the leisure to be full time in it. We talked about income-sharing but never did it. We talked about finding some way to subsidize the people who had to work and never did that. All the income that was brought in and all the fundraising that was done went right into the production of more films and that perpetuated the reign of the people who had self-sufficient resources or could somehow juggle their

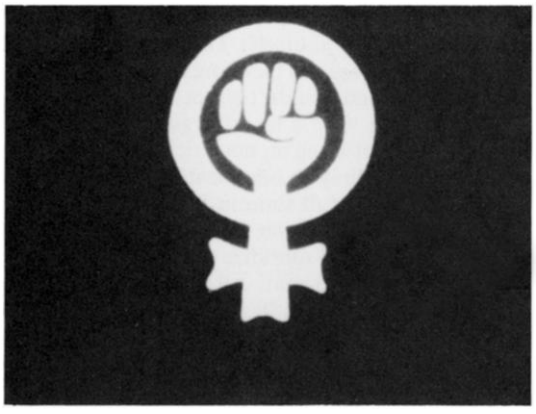
lives or their jobs or whatever so that they could do that. And I don't think it bothered us that much at the time. I remember thinking that, yeah, it was absolutely unfair and there was nothing to be done about it.[17]

Problems arising from inequities internal to the collective—income differentials, housing, or childcare needs—were viewed as secondary to the pressing struggle for social change. The politics of sexuality and of everyday life remained issues to be addressed in a later phase of the organization.

By the early seventies, although the first generation Newsreelers had left the organization, factionalism based on differences of privilege and access enjoyed by collective members prevailed. From 1971 to 1973, New York Newsreel members split themselves into "haves" and "have-nots," with the distinctions among ethnicity, class background, and functional class position somewhat blurred. Thus Christine Choy, a Chinese woman, at 22 the holder of a master's degree in architecture from Columbia University, was a have-not, due in part to her activities within the organization's Third World Caucus. While salary differentials posed no basis for contention—minimal stipends and rent support for collective dwellings were the extent of financial support—stratification was expressed in subtle forms: the haves edited on a Steenbeck while the have-nots made do with an old Moviola.[18]

But the rift within the collective evidenced by the have/have-not division was only one stage among a series of convulsions that left New York Newsreel a three-person collective by 1973. The success of the San Francisco-shot *The Woman's Film* (1971) had coincided with the emergence of an outspoken feminist faction within the New York organization, which began to control distribution and exhibition; most of the men left the collective in the months that followed.

From THE WOMEN'S FILM



As the Third World faction within the group began to focus on recruiting minorities and passing on production skills, the rift between white members and those of color intensified to the breaking point. With the dwindling of the membership, the resources capable of sustaining the collective enterprise were near exhaustion. Gone were the human resources—years of experience in shooting and assembling footage under pressure for no money, and the financial reserves—family wealth to be tapped, as well as most of the equipment.

It should be noted that while the schisms that developed within Newsreel during the early seventies around class, gender, and race effected a series of ruptures at the localized, institutional level, these organizational convulsions serve to reinforce a sense of continuity at a broader historical level. For indeed, these were the same issues (gender, race, class) that increasingly split the always tenuous coalition of New Left/countercultural forces as the focus on war resistance waned. As debates over contradictions, primary and secondary, came to occupy center stage within Movement organizations, consensus collapsed. Newsreel was never merely a reflection or conduit, that is, *about* Movement tactics and sensibilities; it has always remained *of* the Movement, a palpable index of shifting fortunes and newfound necessities.

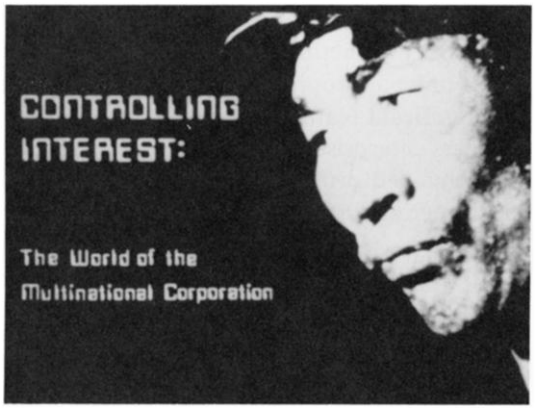
The single factor that ensured New York Newsreel's viability in 1973 remains the material basis for twenty years of continuity despite convulsions from within—that is, the collection of films themselves. The resurgence of production in New York did not occur until 1975 when work began on *From Spikes to Spindles* (1976), a project that established Third World Newsreel's reputation for compact, historically situated overviews of ethnic minorities in crisis (in this case, Chinese Americans in New York). Until that time, the focus of collective activity remained the revival of distribution of the original Newsreel collection (achieved in part through the issuing of a new catalogue) which was recognized as the backbone of the organization. The films were the sole resources that remained to the New York organization in

1973; they have sustained the Newsreel effort since that time as financial asset and historical legacy even as the New York and San Francisco collectives move toward a reordering of goals and priorities.

CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL

The film-making collective calling itself California Newsreel was formed in 1975 from the ashes of a San Francisco Newsreel branch which had absorbed the sort of gut-wrenching political upheavals and bitter factionalism that shook the New York group during the same period. (The chief source of San Francisco's division was a move toward the Revolutionary Communist Party by certain influential Newsreel members.) By 1978, California Newsreel was comprised of three white males—Larry Daressa, Larry Adelman, and Bruce Schmiechen—none of whom had been a part of the earlier incarnation of the San Francisco Newsreel collective that produced *Black Panther* and other militant films from 1968–73. Several years later, another collective member was brought on to deal exclusively with archival and distributional matters (a black man, Cornelius Moore) while only recently Schmiechen has left the collective to pursue independent projects.

No greater contrast could prevail between Cal Newsreel and its predecessors with regard to its financial underpinnings, organizational precision, and concentration on distribution over production. Unlike New York Newsreel of the early years (and to a lesser extent Third World Newsreel), California Newsreel has emphasized distribution over production. Indeed, in the twelve years of its existence, the collective has produced only two films of its own while becoming a major player within a clearly demarcated sector of the educational film market. Cal Newsreel distributes films of particular interest to an audience of economists, sociologists, and labor historians for classroom use; to labor educators and organizers within the trade union movement; and to various progressive and special interest groups at the grass-roots level (churches, action groups, campus organizations). The two films produced, *Controlling Interest* and *The Business of America . . .*, were the results of the collective's perception of a felt need within this clearly defined audience and within the Left in general. *Controlling*



Interest attempts in its 45 minutes to explain the complex nature and operating procedures of the multinational corporation and was produced at a time when no such study was available for purposes of political education. The film has sold over 800 prints since its release in 1978.

The Business of America . . . likewise aimed to fill a gap in the available public-educational resources. It was conceived in the aftermath of the Reagan victory and was intended as a more personalized treatise than the data-heavy *Controlling Interest,* capable of exposing the massive failures of the Reagan economic program and its supply-side, trickle-down ethos. Both films "found" their audience precisely because they were tailored to its particular needs—arrived at through a variety of feed-back mechanisms and close contact with the client groups.

No longer can the Newsreel audience be defined as an amorphous mass of like-minded individuals concerned to stay abreast of breaking stories of exploitation and political victories. It's now a discrete body of buyers or renters of a media product deemed vital to the educational needs of their organization or curriculum. What is interesting about this shift is that, to a certain extent, these two audiences overlap inasmuch as the 1980s generation of Left academics, organizers, and educators are largely drawn from that ill-defined body of radicalized spectators of the late sixties/early seventies. If California Newsreel seems a more briskly functional and business-like version of its progenitors, the same can be said of its audience, the Left activists who have survived into the eighties, who have withstood the onslaught of budget cuts, diminishing numbers, and the nation's mood-swing to the right.

Since I have discussed the two California Newsreel productions at length elsewhere, it seems more appropriate to concentrate here on the significant features of the organization as a business enterprise.[19] The San Francisco group has remained profitable by a combination of prescience and hard work. In the months after the Soweto uprisings in South Africa (June 1976), a collective decision was made to choose a Southern African focus—to purchase the distribution rights to a variety of films about Southern Africa and related issues in order to distribute them to interested parties worldwide. At the time, no such collection of films existed; even now, California Newsreel is the world's principal source of films on apartheid, divestment, and related issues with a total of 21 documentaries acquired from independents and BBC alike.

The escalation of apartheid aggression throughout Southern Africa over the past several years and the upswing of world interest in countering the brutality of the Botha government through sanctions and strategies of resistance have subsequently rendered these films a resource in high demand. During the recent nationwide surge of campus protests against corporate investment in South Africa, California Newsreel played a vital role in boosting the level of educated debate simply by providing a range of relevant films as well as printed material researched and developed over nearly a decade.* Once again, although perhaps in a less dramatic fashion than in 1968, Newsreel was in the right place at the right time.

California Newsreel's formula for fiscal success combines business acumen with a knack for low-budget production made possible by the shrewd recycling of archival footage and, in the beginning at least, the ability to attract donated labor (crew members, editing assistants, etc.). *Controlling Interest* was made for $30,000 with only 10% of that figure generated internally. The Methodist Church, small foundations, and concerned individuals provided the bulk of the funding for that project while *The Business of America* . . . was financed largely (2/3 of the $120,000 total cost) by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the corporate arm of the Public Broadcasting System now firmly controlled by Reagan acolytes. In the first year of its circulation, more than 250 prints of the film were sold to what can only be considered its secondary market (a series of nationwide PBS airdates broadcast the film to approximately four million Americans).

The remarkable truth is that California Newsreel can boast liquid assets sufficient to ensure its existence for years to come. In spite of its bountiful resources, each collective member draws the same salary ($25,000 annually) and will continue to do so, no matter how bullish the Left-wing educational film market may become. In fact, all workers—from Daressa and Adelman to the person who sweeps the floors at the crumbling, warehouse-district office perched in its San Francisco alleyway—receive the same base pay. This feature of the organization is its clearest link with Newsreel's past. There is one additional point of tangency with the early days, at least with one faction of the first New York collective. California Newsreel's activities as producer and distributor are deeply tied to the perceived requirements of the American Left and are calculated in pragmatic, politically sophisticated terms. Like the core membership of New Left ideologues of the late sixties, Cal Newsreel (and Daressa in particular), is equal to the task of mastering the vagaries of contemporary Marxist theory as well as mainstream economic thought and of offering cogently argued, conceptually sound analyses and critiques of national labor policies and long-term economic programs.

In something of a departure from its past achievements, California Newsreel has chosen to mark its twentieth anniversary year by launching a major five-year project aimed at deconstructing media as conventionally produced and received. This "Media on Media" project will attempt to use the prevailing technology (namely, broadcast television) to generate a meta-discourse on communications, an anti-television capable of exploring new modes of expression as well as new techniques for reading—in effect, to establish a context for exchange between media products and their au-

*Over its 12-year lifespan, California Newsreel has published eight separate catalogues and five books including an 88-page text entitled *Planning Work*, a manual of resources on technology and investment for labor education funded by the Ford Foundation and the German Marshall Fund. *Using Films in South Africa: An Activation Kit on Investment* contains suggestions for post-film discussions, a series of fact sheets exposing the scope of U.S. investment in South Africa and a packet of reprinted articles covering precise, related topics culled from newspapers, scholarly journals and pamphlets.

diences. California Newsreel thus commits itself to the creation of an environment favorable to a rejuvenated, experimental, reflexive documentary form at a moment of flagging hopes among American independent producers.

California Newsreel thus announces a dramatic shift of emphasis from "point of production" (the work place) to "point of reception" (the home) consistent with its analysis of the political/cultural focus that Left organizations need to develop in present circumstances. But the concern for engaging a nationwide rather than Movement audience is in accord with the organizations's public profile for nearly a decade. As co-chair of the National Coalition of Independent Public Television Producers, Larry Daressa has lobbied strenuously in Washington for a more meaningful role for independent producers within public broadcasting's program schedule as a way of insuring the vitality of contestation within an ever more uniform cultural climate. The present "Media on Media" project, while unique to the American airwaves, is clearly consistent with the efforts of British Channel Four's Michael Jackson, producer of "Open the Box" (1986), a six-part series exploring the complexities and social effects of television, and Jean-Luc Godard whose groundbreaking videoworks of the seventies (*Six Fois Deux* and *France/Tour/Detour/Deux Enfants*) radically challenged the French viewing public's media expectations at formal and thematic levels. Indeed, California Newsreel's ultimate aim is to intervene in the viewing habits of America, to alter not so much what we see but how we see it. This will mean working to establish a space for innovation and experimentation on American television, perhaps through the creation of an Independent Programming Service on the order of Britain's Channel Four to explore new dissemination technologies and sponsor unconventional programming. Perhaps it is the sheer scale of such aspirations that provides the clearest vector of continuity with the New Left utopianism of Newsreel's founding moment.

THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL

As we have seen, the early Newsreel operation was able to offer battlefront coverage of contemporary struggles from a recognizably Left perspective—quickly and in vast number.

From an early Newsreel brochure

If that function has been lost at California Newsreel, it lives on at the Manhattan headquarters of Third World Newsreel. At a time when politically oriented documentary filmmaking in the United States has suffered a near-catastrophic decline, Third World has remained capable of producing films at a dizzying pace. The garment district offices of the collective are always alive with production activities at several stages; the editing rooms are in constant use for in-house projects while visiting independent film-makers frequently avail themselves of the facilities and expertise at hand. In 1985, Third World shot and completed two 50-minute films, both of them commissioned or initiated by outside sources rather than generated from within the organization. *Namibia: Independence Now* was commissioned by the United Nations Council on Namibia; distributed by Third World Newsreel, the film has been translated into seven languages. *Chronicle of Hope: Nicaragua* was a project developed in coordination with the Nicaraguan Peace Fleet, a Florida-based organization that regularly ships clothing and medical supplies donated by concerned Americans. The film traces a single journey from its source in upstate New York, through

a series of American communities, to the point of embarkation in Florida and at last to safe harbor in Nicaragua, thus establishing a human bridge among nations.

The primary sources of this productive momentum remain Christine Choy and Allan Siegel who, while maintaining a long-standing personal relationship, manage to stay involved in countless projects simultaneously, all at different stages of completion. Siegel's relationship with Newsreel extends from the original December 1967 meeting through 1970 and from 1974 to the present. During that time, he has worked in a range of capacities: shooting much of *Columbia Revolt;* editing and directing such early works as *Garbage, America, Community Control, Pig Power,* and *We Demand Freedom*. Siegel's recent credits include the Nicaraguan film and one of the three segments of *The Mississippi Triangle,* a 1984 film that examines a particularly eccentric ethnic conjuncture—Chinese/black intermarriage in white Mississippi—with film-makers of each ethnic background directing the appropriate segments.

Choy has directed at a furious pace for the past decade, receiving in the process fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Film Institute, and the National Endowment of the Arts. Having come to the US as a teenager from the People's Republic of China to attend school, Choy retains something of the outsider's view of American culture and politics. She has a photographer's eye and the skills of a graphic artist refined during her years of architectural training; she designs many of the layouts for the pamphlets and booklets which Third World distributes. Choy has also maintained a high profile in the Asian-American film and art-making communities and is active in a range of related organizations, coalitions, and support groups.

Unlike their San Francisco cousins, Third World Newsreel cannot begin to support its many projects through the sales and rentals of its films. Films are financed on an ad hoc basis, each one having a life and history of its own. In answer to a question concerning the economic health of the organization, Siegel replied: "Generally, we survive. There's a certain tension to that survival which just has to do with being a marginal-type arts organization. . . . Basically, we're a small business. It's taken us a while to figure out how you survive as a small business, and in that sense, California Newsreel is much more adept. . . . We've been somewhat more anarchistic in that regard."[20].

And yet, the track record of Third World Newsreel is a tremendously solid one. When increased funding for women's and minority arts projects began to become available in the late seventies, Third World Newsreel was already a veteran organization with an impressive roster of completed films to its credit. Choy's enduring advocacy in the field of Asian-American cultural studies and her high visibility within ongoing lobbying efforts for minority access to public funding have helped to secure for Third World Newsreel and other minority media groups some measure of financial stability. Another avenue of Newsreel's sponsorship has been the establishment of the Third World Producers Project administered by the Film News Now Foundation, conduit for a variety of Newsreel-related projects. Under the leadership of Choy and Renee Tajima (a frequent Third World Newsreel collaborator), the program provides one-on-one consultation to Third World and women media producers in all aspects of their work (fundraising, film and video production skills, distribution). Still another increasingly significant component of the Third World Newsreel portfolio is the Advanced Production Workshop. Begun in 1978, the workshop offers ten to fifteen people a year-long experience in film and video production through weekly classroom sessions culminating in several finished works. The workshops offer valuable training and experience, a community-based alternative to the competitive, industry-oriented film school model.

On another front, Third World Newsreel's exhibition programs constitute a vital sector of the collective's activities. Former Newsreel member Pearl Bowser was responsible for conceiving and programming a series of travelling film exhibitions. "Independent Black American Cinema 1920–1980" began as a retrospective of more than forty films and videotapes showcased in France in 1980 which then toured the United States over a two year period. Other major efforts of this type have included the publication (in 1982) of a booklet entitled "In Color: Sixty Years of Images of Minority Women in the Media," which offers a series of essays intended as a contribution to the dia-

logue around the imaging of Third World women and the position occupied by women within the media. A related program of a dozen films ranging from Ousmane Sembene's *Ceddo* to short independent works such as Sylvia Morales's *Chicana* was organized as an exhibition event in the New York area. A more ambitious exhibition series and accompanying publication was completed in 1983—"Journey Across Three Continents," which combined a diverse selection of films by African cineasts and film-makers of the black diaspora with a lecture series and 70-page catalogue. The series toured 35 cities over a three-year period in an attempt to expose new audiences to the work as well as to convey the richness and diversity of the black experience in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. "Journey Across Three Continents," assembled and curated once again by Pearl Bowser, drew upon the research contributions of seven Black Studies scholars. Through its exhibition projects, Third World Newsreel has sought to facilitate dialogue between minority artists and concerned spectators, to develop an American audience for black and Third World media works outside the major urban centers. In this sense, Third World Newsreel shares California Newsreel's emphasis upon organizing at the "point of reception."

Spearheaded by Ada Gay Griffin, who joined Third World Newsreel through the Advanced Production Workshop, distribution has become an area of intensified focus with the collection including more than 150 films and tapes. In addition to the early Newsreels, Cuban and Vietnamese films of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the subsequent Newsreel projects of Siegel and Choy, the Third World Newsreel catalogue features the work of such independent producers as Arthur Dong, Charles Burnett, Steve Ning, Lourdes Portillo, and numerous lesser-known artists. By opting for nonexclusive contracts with minority producers, Third World seeks further coverage and heightened visiblity for producers, while offering an average 50% return to the film-maker. Griffin has emphasized outreach to educational and community groups on a sliding scale: "I use discretion to give discounts to people I know should have access to the film."[21] The priority here is to promote the work of minority artists unable to find distributional outlets elsewhere due to the limited appeal or controversial

nature of the work—or its aesthetic roughness. In Griffin's opinion, the time has not yet arrived when aesthetic standards alone can be allowed to determine the life of socially concerned programming. Training programs and consultational services rather than elitist distributional practices have been chosen as the way to raise the level of professionalism within the minority media community.

The Anthology of Asian-American Film and Video functions as an additional and ongoing distribution project for the collective. Begun in 1984, the Anthology houses some thirty films by and about Asian-Americans making this the most significant collection of such work. Like the larger Third World distributional scheme of which it is a part, the Anthology functions as a clearinghouse and organizational vehicle for independent productions, both documentary and fiction, which would be hard-pressed to find their appropriate audiences. The Anthology is a serious contribution toward the redress of an historical imbalance, the exclusion from public view of the dreams, aspirations and achievements of minority populations within the United States. Given its history and the tenacity of the core collective members, Third World Newsreel's position in the vanguard of cultural-political change seems assured.

CONCLUSION

In assessing the complex contributions of Newsreel in its various incarnations, we must note the relationship of the local and cultural to the macro-economic or infrastructural level which is, in the end, determinant. The unceremonious retreat of progressive forces in this decade has by now convinced us that a Marcusean analysis sacrifices explanatory or predictive

power for inspirational zeal.[22] Fredric Jameson, in a recent ambitious attempt to periodize the sixties, concludes that the turbulent decade represented, after all, a moment of transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another. The eighties can, according to Jameson, be characterized as global capitalism's moment of reentrenchment, the era in which the unbound social forces and liberating energies of the prior moment must be brought to heel. The sixties unleashing of prodigious and unexpected new forces, issuing from the social movements of blacks, students, feminists and Third Worlders, produced a kind of "surplus consciousness" disinclined to forward the multinational corporate agenda.[23] It is these emergent, relatively maverick constituencies that late capitalism must now attempt to proletarianize. But Newsreel has, from its beginnings, remained an active contributor to the development and dissemination of this "surplus consciousness," advocating resistance to the hegemonic while cultivating the values of a nascent political culture. Amidst the conservative backsliding and backlashing of the eighties, Newsreel has emerged as America's most consistent radical documentary voice. If, in the early years, its films spoke primarily to the Movement vanguard, Newsreel has moved toward a deepening of its ties with a broad spectrum of working Americans, offering a coherent Left perspective for an analysis-starved audience as well as a route to public access for minority artists. And finally, through continuing distribution of the early films of struggle and confrontation, the Newsreel enterprise has sustained the popular memory of concerted, energetic political activism. If the efforts of the sixties are to escape recuperation, to survive and, in time, to be renewed, it will be through cultural as well as political agitation. Given the history of the organization and its achievements to date, one can reasonably look to Newsreel for leadership in the struggle ahead.

NOTES

The address of California Newsreel is 613 Natoma Street, San Francisco, CA 94103; tel. (415) 621-6196. Third World Newsreel is located at 335 W. 38th Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10018; tel. (212) 947-9277.

1. From a series of interviews with Newsreel members in *Film Quarterly* XX, No. 2 (Winter 1968-69), 47-48.

2. Author's interview with Larry Daressa, 22 December 1983.

3. See Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Film and Revolution,* unpublished master's thesis, UCLA, 1972. Nichols has, to date, produced the most valuable and extensive scholarship on Newsreel. In addition to the fine master's thesis cited here, see his *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

4. Newsreel was but one of many Movement manifestations of the "Great Refusal." Identifying with the dispossessed, the relatively affluent first generation Newsreelers cast their lot with those systematically excluded from privilege. By the end of the decade, the lumpen ranks were swelled by middle-class youth who rejected their birthright in order to effect meaningful social change.

5. Interview with Norm Fruchter in *Film Quarterly,* 44.

6. Author's interview with Deborah Schaffer, 19 August 1986.

7. A particularly striking index of the shift of organizing focus and radical sensibility from 1965 to 1969 is provided by contrasting two films by Norman Fruchter, one of the central figures of Newsreel's "first generation." *Troublemakers* (Fruchter and Robert Machover, 1966) chronicles an SDS organizing effort (the Newark Community Union Project led by Tom Hayden) that brought the skills and energy of middle-class college students to a black ghetto of the urban north. The film's brilliance lies in its willingness to consider the Movement's shortcomings and limitations in the period preceding the outbreaks of violence and confrontation. For further discussion of this phase of New Left realpolitik, see Wini Breines, *The Great Refusal: Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-69* (New York: Praeger, 1982). The second film, *Summer '68* (Fruchter and John Douglas, 1969), focuses on the several facets of cultural and political struggle within the ranks of a foundering New Left coalition (the G.I. coffee house movement, the underground press, draft resistance organizing) which culminated in the August 1968 confrontation on the streets of Chicago at the Democratic National Convention. The shift is from community organizing to mass agitation, from fighting small battles using non-violent tactics to waging mass-mediated war with Daley's shock troops.

8. Interviews with two founding New York Newsreel members, Allan Siegel and Norm Fruchter.

9. This political/aesthetic bifurcation, though significant, obscures the relative homogeneity of the class, race, and gender composition of both factions. Neither women nor people of color tended to occupy positions of leadership in the organization prior to 1971.

10. Nichols, *Newsreel: Film and Revolution,* 73.

11. Interview with Marilyn Buck and Karen Ross in *Film Quarterly,* 44.

12. *Rat* (October 29-November 12, 1969), 8.

13. Interview with Robert Kramer in *Film Quarterly,* 46.

14. Interview with Marilyn Buck and Karen Ross in *Film Quarterly,* 44.

15. Author's interview with Norm Fruchter, 18 June 1985.

16. Author's interview with Allan Siegel, 18 June 1985.

17. Author's interview with Fruchter. In addition to the ideologues and the underground filmmakers, another smaller faction of Newsreel producers existed—still primarily male—composed of those who raised funds necessary for production through illicit activities, principally drug-dealing. Pot was the ritual cornerstone of the counterculture; funds generated by its sale, when turned to the public good, were viewed as a fully legitimate source of income. The fallout from that method of fund-raising was a small but painful rate of attrition as Newsreelers were sent to prison on drug charges.

18. Author's interview with Christine Choy, 20 August 1986. Choy noted that her first Newsreel paycheck was not drawn until 1981, a full ten years after her arrival. A two-year CETA grant, welfare and unemployment compensation furnished her means of survival for a decade.

19. See my "The Imaging of Analysis: Newsreel's Re-Search for a Radical Film Practice," *Wide Angle* 6, No. 3 (1984), 76-84.

20. Author's interview with Siegel.

21. Author's interview with Ada Gay Griffin, 8 August 1986.

22. See in particular Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), which contains the following succinct formulation of the

"aesthetic ethos" of the sixties, a theoretical position that validated the realm of the creative imagination independent of quotidian (and frequently neglected) efforts toward mass base-building: ". . . the development of the productive forces beyond their capitalist organization suggests the possibility of freedom *within* the realm of necessity. The quantitative reduction of necessary labor could turn into quality (freedom) . . . But the construction of such a society presupposes a type of man with a different sensitivity as well as consciousness: men who would speak a different language, have different gestures, follow different impulses . . . The imagination of such men and women would fashion their reason and tend to make the process of production a process of creation." Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 21.

23. Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60's," in *The 60's Without Apology,* 208–209.

MARSHA KINDER

Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality:

A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar*

Following the enthusiastic critical reception of Pedro Almodóvar's *La Ley del Deseo (The Law of Desire)* at this year's Berlin Film Festical, Spain's oldest and largest-circulation film journal, *Fotogramas & Video,* ran an editorial saying:

> "The recent Berlin Festival has demonstrated an important fact for Spanish cinema: the interest that our cinema can arouse abroad, not only at the level of interchange or cultural curiosity, but as an exportable and commercially valid product. . . . Spanish cinema is trying to leave the national 'ghetto' and join a movement that proclaims the necessity and urgency of a 'European cinema' which transcends nationalities without renouncing their specificity."[1]

Although this editorial mentions several films at the festival to support its point, it focuses most specifically on "the enormous and overwhelming success of *La Ley del Deseo. . . ,* a film that is eminently 'Spanish' but comprehensible to any person," and which confirms that "when one makes a cinema that has something to say, these things can have appeal everywhere."

Fotogramas fails to acknowledge the irony that this film being singled out as a model of "universal" appeal is an outrageous melodrama featuring homosexual and transsexual protagonists in a sado-masochistic triangle involving incest, murder, and suicide and including several sexually explicit homoerotic love scenes. It's a film that in most national contexts would be marginal, to say the least. And yet in March, when it was screened in New York, concurrent with but not as part of the Ministry of Culture's Third Annual Spanish Film Week (which included an equally extreme Almodóvar melodrama called *Matador*), *La Ley del Deseo* again received critical raves in the *Village Voice* and in the *New Yorker* where Pauline Kael devoted a full page to the film—an achievement that was duly reported as "news" in Spain's most prestigious daily, *El País.*[2]

At the very moment when Spanish cinema may be facing its most serious economic crisis, Almodóvar's films are achieving modest success both at home and abroad. Since the death of Franco in 1975 and despite the earnest efforts of the Socialist government which came to power in 1982, Spanish films have not only failed to find adequate distribution in foreign markets, but they have steadily been losing their home audience. Spanish spectators are either staying home in droves with their VCRs or flocking to see the latest imports which increasingly dominate Spanish movie houses with their block booking. The number of total spectators who attended movies in Spain decreased from

*This conversation took place on May 25, 1987 at Pedro Almodóvar's piso in Madrid. It was made possible by a research grant from the Comité Conjunto Hispano Norteamericano para la Cooperación Cultural y Educativa.

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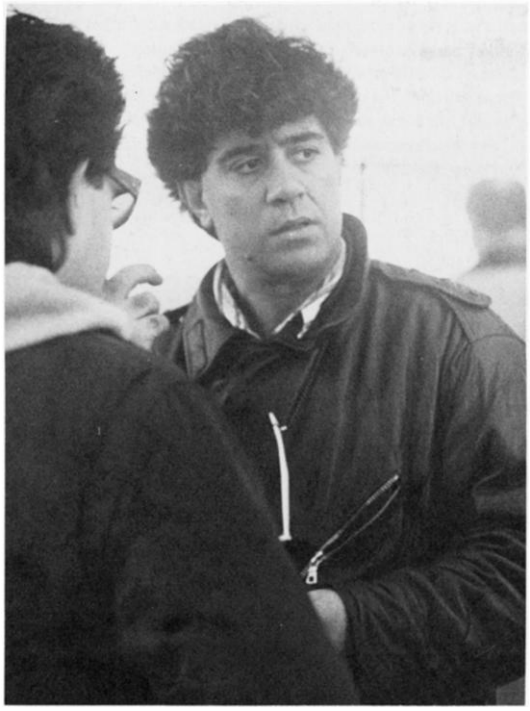

Pedro Almodóvar at work

331 million in 1970 to 101 million in 1985, and by 1985 Spanish films held only 17.5% of that diminishing home market, as opposed to 30% in 1970.[3] Within this discouraging context, Almodóvar's early features did surprisingly well in Spain and *Matador* was an outstanding success—the third-largest-grossing Spanish film in 1986.[4] The final figures are not yet in on *La Ley del Deseo,* but they promise to be even better. It's the first Almodóvar film to be immediately sold wordwide—virtually everywhere but in Japan.

Almodóvar's films have a curious way of resisting marginalization. Never limiting himself to a single protagonist, he chooses an ensemble of homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, doper, punk, terrorist characters who refuse to be ghettoized into divisive subcultures because they are figured as part of the "new Spanish mentality"—a fast-paced revolt that relentlessly pursues pleasure rather than power, and a postmodern erasure of all repressive boundaries and taboos associated with Spain's medieval, fascist, and modernist heritage. Almodóvar claims:

> "I always try to choose prototypes and characters from modern-day Madrid, who are somehow representative of a certain mentality existing today. . . . I think that since Franco died new generations have been coming to the fore, generations that are unrelated to former ones, that are even unrelated to the 'progressive' generations that appeared during the last years of the dictatorship. How do people 20 years old live in Madrid? It's quite complex. . . . The characters in my films utterly break with the past, which is to say that most of them, for example, are apolitical. Pleasure must be grasped immediately, hedonistically; that is almost the main leitmotif of their lives."[5]

This new mentality was already present in Almodóvar's first low-budget, underground feature (made in 16mm and blown up to 35), *Pepi, Lucy, Bom y Otros Chicas del Montón* (retitled in English *Pepi, Lucy, Bom and Other Girls All Like Mom,* 1980), where a policeman, who's married to middle-aged Lucy, rapes their young neighbor Pepi and tries to cover up his crime by planting marijuana on her balcony. Lucy responds by becoming sexually invovled with a girl even younger than Pepi, a 16-year-old pleasure lover named Bom, and Pepi writes their love story. The rape is further avenged by Pepi's friends from a punk rock group who, in order to attract the rapist, disguise themselves as traditional Spanish zarzuela singers.

The new mentality of 20-year-olds was seen even more clearly in Almodovar's second splashy feature *Laberinto de Pasiones (Labyrinth of Passions,* 1982), which positively bristles with vibrant color and a wildly comic sexual energy. The tortuously complex plot follows the tangled passions of an ensemble of young Madrileños trying to escape the crippling influences of repressive fathers in order to pursue their own pleasure. Riza Niro (Imanol Arias) is the bisexual son of the deposed "emperor of Tehran." More interested in sex and cosmetics than in family or politics, he flees his corrupt, cancerous father and lecherous, infertile stepmother, becomes a punk singer in Madrid, and ultimately flies away with the Felliniesque Sexilia (Celia Roth), a nymphomaniac member of a feminist punk band called "Las Ex" and daughter of a world-class sex-loathing gynecologist, whose scientific detachment drives his daughter to promiscuity. Queti, a young laundress who is chronically raped by her dry-cleaning daddy on alternate days, undergoes plastic surgery to become Sexilia's surrogate on stage and at home where she enters a budding incestuous relationship with her new doctor daddy. This two-faced incestuous daughter feeds both daddies powerful potions that render

The final embrace of the erotic killers in MATADOR

one impotent, the other horny. The fleeing lovers Riza and Sexy are hotly pursued by an assortment of jealous punks and Islamic fundamentalists, but none so dogged as the super-keen-scented Sadec, a handsome Tehranian terrorist (played by Antonio Banderas) who also loves Riza in spite of politics. This "musical comedy" (for which Almodóvar himself wrote and performed some of the wildest songs) is still running on weekends as a midnight cult movie in Madrid.

Though I haven't seen Almodóvar's third feature, *Entre Tinieblas* (retitled in English *Sisters of Darkness,* 1983), it's reported to be about a community of nuns known as the "Humble Redeemers" who run a home for delinquent girls, where, among other pleasurable pastimes, the sisters keep a pet tiger, write steamy best-sellers, smoke pot, and shoot dope.

¿Qué He Hecho Yo para Merecer Ésto? (What Have I Done to Deserve This?, 1984/85), Almodóvar's first international hit, follows the travails of Gloria (Carmen Maura), a high-rise suburban housewife who toils as a maid to help support her family, which includes: a taxi-driver husband who's obsessed with a suicidal German singer and who gets involved in a plot to forge Hitler's memoirs; two sons—a teenage heroin dealer and a 12-year-old homosexual; and a dotty mother-in-law who yearns for her pet lizard and her home village. Despite these pressures, both the soapish heroine and her narrative still have time for needy neighbors—a cheerful hooker who longs to go to Las Vegas and a haughty mother who abuses her telekinetic child. Ultimately, downtrodden Gloria kills her troublesome husband, her doper son goes to live with his granny in her home village, and her homosexual prodigal son returns home from the lecherous dentist who "adopted" him just in time to save his despondent mother from suicide.

Matador (1985/86) is an exercise in excess, a stylish psychological thriller with extravagant costumes, lush visuals, and the narrative logic of erotic fantasy. It opens with a montage of violence against women, movie images being watched on a VCR by an ex-matador as he masturbates. Having been gored in the ring, Diego Montes (Nacho Martinez) now only *teaches* bullfighting, but to recapture the ecstasy of the kill, he murders young girls. Angered by the insinuation that he might be a repressed homosexual, Angel (Antonio Banderas), one of Diego's virginal students, tries to rape his next door neighbor Eva, who conveniently (for the Oedipal subtext) just happens to be Diego's young fashion-model mistress. Angel is sexually disturbed, not only by an evil repressive mother who belongs to Opus Dei (an extreme rightwing lay religious organization), but also by a supernatural ability to see the violent and erotic acts of others and to imagine they are his own. Not only does he see the serial murders of his men-

La Ley del Deseo

tor Diego, but also those of his famous female defense lawyer María Cardenal, a beautiful man-killer, with a secret obsession with matadors, which she picked up while watching Diego being gored. Once Diego and María meet in a movie house during the lust-in-the-dust climax of *Duel in the Sun,* these erotic killers see their destiny and give up all other pursuits. Guiding a group of interested parties—Diego's discarded mistress Eva, the maternal psychiatrist (Carmen Maura) who gives Angel loving support, and the police inspector (Eusebio Poncela) who has eyes for Angel and other young men in tight matador pants—Angel and company try to forestall the final fatal orgasm of Diego and María, but they arrive in time only to witness with envy the blissful smiles of the dead lovers.

La Ley del Deseo (1986) is another psychological thriller of excess, but this time about two brothers, Pablo and Tina. Pablo (Eusebio Poncela) is a homosexual screenwriter/director who is in love with a young bisexual named Juan (Miguel Molina) and who rewrites Juan's love letters to make them suit his own standard of absolute passion. One of his soft-core films deeply arouses a young spectator named Antonio (Antonio Banderas), who subsequently has his first homosexual experience with Pablo and immediately is transformed into a possessive lover. When Antonio reads the love letter from Juan that was actually written by Pablo, he becomes insanely jealous and murders his rival. Stunned by grief over Juan's murder, Pablo has a car accident and suffers amnesia. Pablo's brother Tina, formerly Tino (brilliantly played by Carmen Maura), is a transsexual actress who loved and was abandoned by her father and who now hates men. The lesbian model she lives with (ironically played by real-life transsexual Bibi Andersen) has deserted both Tina and her own 10-year-old daughter Ada, who now adopts Tina as her mother and falls in love with Pablo. In order to force Pablo to see him after the murder, Antonio seduces Tina and then holds her hostage, so that he will be granted a final hour of love. Although Pablo goes to the assignation with hatred and dread, his feelings are miraculously transformed into love by the purity of Antonio's passion.

Born in 1949 in the small village of Calzada de Calatrava near Ciudad Real, Almodóvar claims he always felt "like an astronaut in the court of King Arthur" and "knew he was born to take on the big cities." By the time he was eight, this quixotic child was living in La Mancha and then in Cáceres, where he studied with the Salesianos and Franciscans and finished his baccalaureate. In 1967, at 17, he finally made it to Madrid where he immediately became a hippy and then a white-collar worker at the National Telephone Company. After hours, he became a versatile member of Madrid's artistic underground—doing comic strips for underground magazines; acting in the avant-garde theater group *Los Golliardos;* recording and performing live in a rock band called Almodóvar and McNamara; publishing journalistic articles, parodic memoirs (under the pen name Patty Diphusa), a porno photo-story, and a novella; and making experimental short films, first in 8mm and then in 16. Even after making his first feature in 1980, he still continued writing and singing. But by the time he made *Entre Tinieblas* in 1983, his first film to be sent to a foreign festival and sold outside of Spain, he was launched as an international auteur.

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What do you think is the primary appeal of your films, especially of La Ley del Deseo *which has had such international success, whereas most Spanish films have had such difficulty in getting international distribution?*

Well, I've been striving for this over the last three years, and I think this is the fruit of my previous work. People know me more now, and it's easier for me to sell a film. On the other hand, I think my films are very contemporary. They represent more than others, I suppose, the new Spain, this kind of new mentality that appears in Spain after Franco dies. Above all, after 1977 till now. Stories about the new Spain

have appeared in the mass media of every country. Everybody has heard that now everything is different in Spain, that it has changed a lot, but it is not so easy to find this change in the Spanish cinema. I think in my films they see how Spain has changed, above all, because now it is possible to do this kind of film here. Not that a film like *The Law of Desire* would be impossible to make in places like Germany, London or the United States.

Yes, but it would be impossible to have such a film get half of its financing from the ministry of culture in any of those countries! How would you define "the new Spanish mentality"?

I believe that the new Spanish mentality is less dramatic—although I demonstrate the contrary in my films. We have consciously left behind many prejudices, and we have humanized our problems. We have lost the fear of earthly power (the police) and of celestial power (the church), and we have also lost our provincial certainty that we are superior to the rest of the world—that typical Latin prepotency. And we have recuperated the inclination toward sensuality, something typically Mediterranean. We have become more skeptical, without losing the joy of living. We don't have confidence in the future, but we are constructing a past for ourselves because we don't like the one we had.

Do you think that the appeal of your films also has something to do with their unique tone? I know that Pauline Kael in her very enthusiastic review of La Ley del Deseo *stressed the uniqueness of the tone without really describing what it is.*

Well, I would like to think this is one of the reasons because this is the main difference of my films. Whether they are good or bad, my films are absolutely different from other Spanish films and even from the other foreign cinema. I mean you can talk about a lot of influences, everybody has them. But if you see all of my films, I'm sure you can differentiate them from the others, you can recognize them. I would like to think this is the main reason for their international appeal.

How would you define that tone?

It's hard for me to talk about it because I never try to verbalize about my films, but it's true there is a different tone, even in general. This is something I'm obsessed with when I'm working with the actors. They have to say my lines in a different way. Even for me this is

La Ley del Deseo

something that's very difficult to explain to them because you have to catch it and you have to feel it. When I'm shooting, I'm obsessed with creating an atmosphere that explains exactly what is my tone. The atmosphere that I create when I'm shooting, this is the tone of my films. To take one example, I used to mix all the genres. You can say my films are melodramas, tragicomedies, comedies or whatever because I used to put everything together and even change genre within the same sequence and very quickly. But the main difference is the private morality. I think one auteur is different from another because he has his own morality. When I say morality, I don't mean ethics, it's just a private point of view. I mean you can see a film by Luis Buñuel and you know exactly that it belongs to Buñuel because it's just the way of thinking.

It seems to me that what lies at the center of your unique tone is what you were describing before, that fluidity with which you move so quickly from one genre to another, or from one feeling or tone to another, so that when a line is delivered, it's very funny and borders on parody and we spectators are just ready to laugh, but at the same time it's erotic and moves us emotionally. In this way, you always demonstrate that you're in control, that you're manipulating the spectator response.

Yes, it takes more care than other styles of acting and shooting. You have to be very careful to control the tone because it can easily run away with you and go too far. Just as you say, in my films everything is just at the border of parody. It's not only parody. It's also the borderline of the ridiculous and of the grotesque. But it's easy to fall over the line.

Other film-makers who come to mind as doing something similar with tone are David Lynch . . .

Absolutely, I recognize myself a lot in *Blue Velvet*. I love it.

I love that film, too. It allows you to be both terrified and turned on and at the same time it's also hysterically funny. And then there's Fassbinder.

But the difference is that Fassbinder, as a German, doesn't have much of a sense of humor. In *Blue Velvet* you can find a great sense of humor, but *Blue Velvet* is more morbid than my films because there is always an element of naiveté in what I'm doing. It's strangely antithetical because I'm not so naive. But this kind of purity of actions, feelings and spontaneity, that's not in *Blue Velvet. Blue Velvet* is darker, sicker, sick in every way. But, with a lot of humor. Do you think there is humor in Fassbinder's films?

Oh yes, although it's always combined with pain.

German culture is so different from Spanish culture. In our culture there is a great sense of humor but not in the German culture. Also, I believe that our culture is more visceral. Intuition and imagination influence us more than reason. There is more adventure and spontaneity. We don't fear disorder or chaos.

Your use of Hollywood melodrama—especially in ¿Qué He Hecho? *where two characters go to see* Splendor in the Grass *and in* Matador *where there's a long excerpt from* Duel in the Sun*—it seems similar to the ways in which Fassbinder used Sirk and even Billy Wilder's* Sunset Boulevard *in* Veronika Voss, *where he picked something already very extreme—and then pushed it even further to that borderline of parody. How do you see the relationship between your work and Hollywood melodrama?*

All of the influences on me and all of the film references in my films are very spontaneous and visual. I don't make any tributes. I'm a very naive spectator. I can't learn from the movies that I love. But if I had to choose one master or model, I would choose Billy Wilder. He represents exactly what I want to do.

Which Billy Wilder? His films are so varied!

Both Billy Wilders. The *Sunset Boulevard* Billy Wilder and *The Apartment* Billy Wilder, the *1-2-3* and *The Lost Weekend. The Lost Weekend,* for example, is a big, big drama but you can find a lot of humor in it and a lot of imagination in the way it develops a unique situation. It's a great challenge for a screenwriter. But to return to the question about Hollywood, I just love that big period of the classic American melodrama. I'm not just talking about Sirk but about the kinds of films Bette Davis made. I like these extreme genres where you can talk naturally about strong sentiments without a sense of the ridiculous. This is something that melodrama has. But, of course, all these films like *Splendor in the Grass* and *Duel in the Sun,* which is so outrageous, I mean you have to be very very brave to dare to go to this kind of extreme, you can really be grotesque if you don't know how to do it. This is something that I like. But I use the genre in a different way. My films are not so conventional as that kind of melodrama. Because I don't respect the boundaries of the genre, I mix it with other things. So my films appear to be influenced by Hollywood melodrama, but I put in other elements that belong more to my culture. For example, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* is more like a neorealist film than melodrama. I think it's more like the films of Rossellini, Zavattini, and DeSica—more like Italian neorealism which is also a melodramatic genre. But I put in a lot of humor. That makes the reality even more awful in a way, more extreme. And I also put in a lot of surrealistic elements that completely change the genre. I think that the presence of the nonrational in my films is strong, but I never try to explain it. For example, in *¿Qué He Hecho?* I don't try to explain the girl with the telekinetic powers, the girl like Carrie. I just put her in as part of the life or plot, and this kind of element changes the genre.

There's a moment in ¿Qué He Hecho? *that helps me understand what you might mean by calling it a neorealist film. In one scene the older son asks for help with his homework in assigning the labels "realist" and "romantic" to famous authors, and his granny reverses the traditional answers, calling Byron a realist and Balzac a romantic. Isn't this joke a comment on your own style? Isn't this exactly what you're doing in this movie—reversing the traditional meanings of realist and romantic?*

That could be, but I had no consciousness of it.

In one of your interviews, you say you admired very much the Spanish neorealism of Marco Ferreri and Fernando Fernán Gómez, films like El Pisito *(1958),* El Cochecito *(1960) and* La Vida por Delante *(1958)—films that combined neorealism with a Spanish absurdist black humor called* esperpento. *In his new book*

Out of the Past, *John Hopewell says that* ¿Qué He Hecho? *continues in this tradition.*[6] *Is this connection valid?*

Yes, very much so. If you have to find some source or relation to Spanish movies for my films, I think they are related to that kind of film. And also to an early film by Francisco Regueiro, *Duerme, Duerme, Mi Amor (Sleep, Sleep, My Love,* 1974). It's wonderful. Have you seen that film?

Yes, it's desperately funny, and I can definitely see the connections with the absurdist black humor and the high-rise living theme in ¿Qué He Hecho?

Yes, this is one line I admire very much, and also early Belanga. For me Berlanga's *Plácido* (1961) is a model.

Is it the film's rapid pacing and its ensemble of comic characters that appeal to you?

Yes, and also this kind of tragic situation, very dark and very sad, but with great naturalness, and this kind of comedy that talks about a lot of things in life very seriously, and this kind of confusion of a lot of people all talking and doing different things at the same time.

Yes, I can see those qualities in your films, especially in ¿Qué He Hecho? . . . *I think one of the most amazing things about* ¿Qué He Hecho? *is that whereas it starts out with distanced reflexivity (with Carmen Maura walking past a film crew as she goes to work as a maid in a martial arts gym) and with burlesque (when she mimics their swordmoves with her broom and has a torrid sexual encounter with a man in a shower who proves to be impotent), still amidst all of the satiric absurdities Maura's performance miraculously remains so realistic that she still manages to generate emotional identification in the spectator. And this has a big payoff in the final sequence when she is saved from suicide by the homecoming of her homosexual son who has just walked out on the lecherous dentist his mother left him with in order to cover the dental bill. We still get a big emotional rush from their reunion, and we're marvelling, how did Almodóvar manage to pull this off!*

Yes, I tried to do that. This is always the challenge that I face whenever I make a film. . . . I try to solve the problem of how to get the big emotion from the audience, how to get emotional identification with the problem (in this case, high-rise apartment living) which lies behind the facade of absurdity, because everything just under the facade is absolutely real.

The downtrodden Gloria stands behind her neighbor hooker and dotty mother-in-law: ¿Que He Hecho Para Merecer Todo Esto?

And I think the audience can always recognize very clearly what I'm trying to say about life in the high-rise. And the jokes have many reasons for being there. For example, the opening titles sequence is very much like an abstract or experimental film with all the crew there making a film while the female protagonist goes to work in that place. That was the square where we were shooting; it was very direct. And in the gym where they're doing kendo, it looks like parody, but it also shows a very aggressive sport—one that releases aggression. And from the beginning you see that she's going to be in a male world and that males are the violent, strong ones who do this kind of thing. And she is just cleaning up. And then she tries to imitate them, just to be more quiet.

It also prepares her for killing her husband with an oxbone.

It's just the surface that's surrealistic, but I think you can understand very well what's just behind that surface. But I always try to work with all of these elements and to make it so that

Murderous matador confronts man-killing lawyer: Matador

the people can feel it. Another example is the big confession scene in *The Law of Desire* when Carmen Maura, as Tina the transsexual, is trying to tell her brother Pablo about her relationship with their father. You know this is really hard. It's very strange, it's not easy to find a girl like that. Well, but I hope, and I felt that during this speech the audience really identifies with Tina as if she were the girl next door, someone with whom they can readily identify. I mean this is really *heavy*. She committed incest and she changed her sex to be with her father. She's one in a million. In this case, the acting is very important. It's Carmen Maura. If she hadn't been so perfect, then you never could have believed it. To do this kind of thing, you have to be very very careful. But if you succeed with that, then the audience can believe and understand everything.

Even within that scene, you seem to purposely make it even harder for yourself, I mean in the way you set it up with her brother's amnesia, which is a highly contrived and corny way of motivating why Tina has to tell him and the audience about her past at this particular moment. And then that comical touch when she mentions Madrid, and then points out the window, saying, Oh yes, this is Madrid! reminding herself and us of the amnesia. And even with these absurdities, we are still swept away by Maura's performance.

Yes, in that scene even Carmen was very surprised because she told me that when I was directing her, I asked her for exactly the opposite of what she thought was right for this scene. She was sure that everyone else would have asked her to do exactly the contrary of what I said. Because the confession was very quiet, not very dramatic. So perhaps that's why you can believe it better. I don't know.

There seems to be a movement in La Ley del Deseo *that is parallel to the one in* ¿Qué He Hecho?, *where you start with reflexivity, in this case a film within a film, in which someone dictates from a script how a young man is to masturbate, and a voyeuristic spectator who—*

Imitates what he sees, yes. . . .

In a way, you start out by demystifying how movies work, but then by the end of the film those same dynamics still work on the audience very powerfully. A film-maker like Buñuel, in showing you how it happens, prevents you from experiencing that kind of pleasure—he offers you a different *kind of pleasure. But you demonstrate how the pleasure works and then make the spectator experience it despite the demonstration.*

Yes, that's true.

My favorite moment in La Ley *is when all the people at the end—Tina, the little girl Ada, and the police—look up with wonder at the window of the apartment where Pablo and his murderous lover Antonio are having their final hour of passionate love.*

Yes, this is one of the moments I'm proudest of—it's like a ritual with the music. I told the cinematographer (Angel Luis Fernández), make it surprising and magical—not exactly like real magic, but like that moment when everyone looks up at the UFOs in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.* I like it very much.

It's wonderful. Their faces are full of awe and envy. Even the police are softened and eroticized by the passion they imagine is going on inside that room. They become the quintessential Almodóvar spectators! Isn't this the third time such a spectatorial moment occurs in the film? The first is the opening where Antonio is watching and is turned on by the erotic scene from Pablo's movie. And the second occurs in the middle of the film where Tina asks a man in the street to hose her down while her brother Pablo and the child Ada watch in wonder. Isn't the film's structure controlled by these three spectatorial moments?

Yes, all three moments you have mentioned are the key to the film. The beginning is the key to understanding everything. I try to put the spectator into the field that I'm going to explore—the field of desire. Everyone understands that you can pay someone to make love to you. But it's very difficult to recognize that you can pay someone just to *listen* to his desire, which is something very different. This sensual desire is more abstract. It's just the necessity of feeling desire in an absolute way. This is the problem in the film. And also, as you said, I explain how the movie is made. You see just the interior of the movie. But also I explain the director's behavior—the relationship between director and actor. The director, on the one hand, is a voyeur, but he also is pushing, dictating exactly what he wants to be enacted, he wants to be represented, and this is very important to the relationship of power and voyeurism between the director and the actor.

And yet aren't both being controlled by the script, which is probably why the script and the typewriter become so essential in the film—with all those huge close-ups and expressionistic angles of the keyboard? I read in one interview where you say the force of Pablo's imagination is stronger than his feelings and that's why he takes the vengeance on the typewriter—why he refuses to write another script and why he throws the typewriter out the window at the end. But couldn't you also say that the script links Pablo to patriarchal discourse?

I don't understand.

Isn't Pablo like his father—a seducer who prefers young boys and who's never totally committed? Doesn't he reenact his father's seduction of his brother and also inspire his lovers to make a sacrifice? Pablo may want to be in control, but isn't he as shaped by his father as Tina was? Aren't his scripts and movies vehicles for patriarchal ideology?

Well, I didn't think of that. Those are new ideas to me, but I agree with them and find them interesting. I like to discover new explanations in my films. It makes them richer. The opening is the main sequence of desire, of abstract desire rather than of sensual pleasure. Sensuality and physical pleasure are far better represented in the central sequence where Tina says, "Hose me!" than in the opening where the boy says, "Fuck me!" That's an important distinction in the film.

But isn't there submission in both? Aren't they both part of the same masochistic aesthetic that also leads you to put the lust-in-the-dust ending of Duel in the Sun *in the middle of* Matador*?*

I don't see it as masochism. Masochism requires pain, and I don't find it in my films . . . I don't see masochism even in the Carmen Maura figure Tina, who is so obsessed with her past. She doesn't want to forget anything, even her worst memories. She's very engaged with her worst memories, they even feed her. This can be masochism too . . . a kind of quotidian masochism. In life in general you have to accept pain. It's a kind of adventure and sometimes pain is the price you have to pay; the things you get are more important than the pain. But masochism requires that you *like* to feel pain. . . . No, my films are more about pleasure, sensuality, and living—about the celebration of living. Don't forget you have

Angel and company try to forestall the final fatal orgasm in MATADOR

to be conscious that for this celebration of absolute pleasure, often you have to pay a very high price. But the price is parallel with the pleasure. This is the theory of *Matador.* If you can find an absolute pleasure, you also have to pay an absolute price. And in the reference to *Duel in the Sun,* there is, of course, what you said, but what was more important for me in this scene is just that when the ex-matador and lawyer come to the cinema, they look at the screen and see their future. It's like when you look into a magic crystal ball. When you go to the cinema, the cinema reflects not your life but your end. And it was exactly the ending of *Duel in the Sun* that is the ending of *Matador.*

But then both in Matador *and* La Ley*, watching movies seems to be a very dangerous activity.*

No, the problem is that *your* mentality is far more rational than ours, than of the Spanish people. And perhaps all of these terrible things are here inside my films. But I don't see these elements so clearly. I'm unconscious of them. I don't want to be so conscious of all these things. You explain everything. I prefer just to inspire, to suggest, not to explain.

I'm not really saying there are "terrible things" in your films, I'm just considering the implications of your choices—like the implications of having your last three films all end the same way—with an orgasmic climax in which two people are brought together in a passionate union that is somehow related to suicide and murder. In making this choice, aren't you romanticizing the price one has to pay for this absolute value? Isn't this a kind of romantic idealism that has connections with fascism since fascism also glamorizes death and sacrifice in

the name of the ideal?

That sounds terrible! (laughs) . . . No, the moral of all my films is to get to a stage of greater freedom. *¿Qué He Hecho?* is about the liberation of women, even if it takes killing. It's very dangerous to see my films with conventional morality. I have my own morality. And so do my films. If you see *Matador* through a perspective of traditional morality, it's a dangerous film because it's just a celebration of killing. *Matador* is like a legend. I don't try to be realistic, it's very abstract, so you don't feel identification with the things that are happening, but with the sensibility of this kind of romanticism. I hope that there is not this kind of fascist element in the celebration of murder. You know, murder happens. I'm not as, what should I say, as "naughty" as Patricia Highsmith. The kind of murder that horrifies me is the kind that happens in her novels—among regular people, where you agree with that murder. This is really immoral.

I think it's your tone that prevents the spectator from taking these murders seriously or from seeing them in terms of traditional morality. I know you've been widely quoted as saying you want to make films as if Franco had never existed, and I think that desire may be related to your refusal to see this potential connection between romantic love and fascism.

Perhaps I didn't fully understand what you said before about my glorification of violence.

It's not just violence, it's violence in the name of a noble sacrifice, which one can also find in Christianity. For example, Tina has an altar in which she puts the image of the Virgin next to that of Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor. . . .

The Spanish people are known to be very religious. But it's not true. What we do in general is to adapt religion for our own needs, as Tina does. She needs to lean on something because she feels very much alone. Religion is there to make her feel better, to keep her company. And the altar contains, not only things of beauty, but all of her memories that accompany her, that prevent her from feeling so lonely. This is the kind of religion she needs. For her, there's a Virgin and a Dictator, and even the toys of the young girl.

Yes, but doesn't the altar serve as the backdrop for the final reunion between Pablo and Antonio, for their Passion?

Yes, in the end they form part of the altar, they become religious figures.

La Ley del Deseo

That's precisely what I mean. You glorify their kind of romantic love by turning it into a religion, by mystifying it with the same ideological trappings that helped to glorify fascism. But with lots of humor. . . . Maybe it's time to turn to another crucial institution that was glorified by Franco, the family. In one interview you noted that Wim Wenders chose a melodrama about the family (Paris, Texas) *to win the hearts of American spectators.*

That was just a joke. I like using the family very much.

In Spanish films, the family is typically made up of cruel mothers, absent, mythified fathers, and stunted, precocious children. And there seems to be a special Spanish version of the Oedipal narrative with a series of displacements of desire and hostility between the mother and the father. Sometimes the object of desire for the son is transferred from mother to father, as in La Ley del Deseo, *but mostly there's a displacement of the hostility, usually directed at the father, onto the mother. I don't find this dynamic in any other national cinema. And this is particularly odd since patriarchal power is so strong, or at least* was *so strong in Spain under Franco. Is it that the father is so threatening, the son has to displace his hostility onto the mother? Why do you think there's so much hostility directed toward the mother?*

I don't know. I defended the mother in *¿Qué He Hecho?* Of course, there was also a bad mother next door, but you actually find this kind of mother in Spain—the one who is so repressive to her children.

Yes, but in Matador *the only evil character is*

not the serial murderers, but Angel's repressive mother from Opus Dei.

Yes, I find this kind of mother very hateful, but there are several other mothers in that film. . . . I feel very close to the mother. The idea of motherhood is very important in Spain. The father was frequently absent in Spain. It's as if the mother represents the law, the police. It's very curious because in my next film project, I have two young girls kill their mother. When you kill the mother, you kill precisely everything you hate, all of those burdens that hang over you. In this film, I'm killing all of my education and all of the intolerance that is sick in Spain.

Is this matricide an act of liberation or is it suicidal?

I don't want to psychoanalyze it. It's like killing the power. In my film, this is a very typical mother from the South, like Bernarda Alba. In order to frighten her two daughters, she tells them that the world is going to be destroyed and that they will be guilty. And the two girls run away. Then the two parents, both the father and the mother, supposedly die, but the mother doesn't really die. When the two girls become women, the mother suddenly appears like a ghost in order to drive them crazy, really crazy, because she behaves like a ghost. It's very surrealistic. At the end, the two girls have a duel with their mother and then, after they kill her, they discover that she was not a ghost, that she was alive. But she was very crazy. The mother's behavior is actually more murderous than that of the girls.

It sounds fascinating. I can't think of any other national cinema that has so many matricides as the Spanish cinema. For example, in 1975, the year that Franco died, there were two major films in which matricide occurs—Furtivos *and* Pascual Duarte. *And later in Saura's* Mamá Cumple Cien Años, *it's attempted again. And now your project! And, what's also strange, in Spanish films the killing of the father is only done by daughters, not by sons.*

It's true. . . . Fathers are not very present in my films. I don't know why. They are not in my films. This is something I just feel. When I'm writing about relatives, I just put in mothers, but I try not to put in fathers. I avoid it. I don't know why. I guess I'm very Spanish.

I guess you treat fathers like Franco, as if they never existed. . . . What is the name of your new project?

I don't know whether I'm going to change it later, but now it's called *Distant Heels.* I remember when I was a child, it was a symbol of freedom for young girls to wear high heels, to smoke and to wear trousers. And these two girls are wearing heels all the time. After running away, the two sisters live together, and the older remembers that she couldn't sleep until the moment that she heard the sound of distant heels coming from the corridor. I also like the title because it sounds like a Western. All this happens in a desert in the South and the look is like that.

What qualities do you strive for in your mise en scène*? Can you make any generalizations about that? The visual look seems quite different from film to film.*

Yes, they *are* different. I'm learning at the same time that I'm shooting. I didn't go to any film school. So everything I learned, was learned while shooting. Also, I like so many different genres and want to go for very different qualities in each film. I have many different sides and want to develop them all. I'm not obsessed with style. I'd like each film to be absolutely different from the others in every possible way. This is a way of learning everything. And I don't want to get bored.

What impact has your success in Berlin and New York with La Ley *had on your new projects? Has it led to any concrete proposals for the future? Any international coproductions?*

For me the success merely means I can sell my films outside of Spain, and that's good for everybody. Right now I don't feel the temptation to make films outside of Spain because here I can work easier and faster and because it's the culture I know better than any other. I'm sure I'll make a film outside of Spain one day, but not now, not for the moment. Someday I would like to make a film in English, but later. Perhaps I'm lazy. But I want to keep working in this way. I want to feel very independent, and now I have to defend my independence even more than before.

NOTES

1. "Cine Español: De Lo Particular a lo Universal," *Fotogramas & Video* (April 1987), p. 7. The translation to English is mine.
2. Pauline Kael, "Manypeeplia Upsidownia," *The New Yorker* (April 20, 1987).

3. Javier Castro, "20 Años de Mercado Cinematográfico Español," *Cineinforme,* Edicion Especial, No 494 (Septiembre 1986), pp. 70-71.
4. Francisco Llinas, *4 Años de Cine Español* (1983-86). Madrid: Festival Internacional de Cine de Madrid, IMAGFIC, 1987, p. 99.
5. Quoted by Peter Besas in *Behind the Spanish Lens: Spanish Cinema under Fascism and Democracy.* Denver: Arden Press, 1985, p. 216.
6. John Hopewell, *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema After Franco.* London: BFI, 1986, p. 239. Although Marco Ferreri is Italian, his earliest features were made in Spain and had enough influence to assure him an important place in the history of Spanish cinema.

Reviews

BLUE VELVET

Directed by David Lynch. Script: Lynch. Photography: Frederick Elmes. Editor: Duwayne Dunham. Music: Angelo Badalamenti. DeLaurentiis.

Much of the humor in David Lynch's reworked fifties crime thriller/horror/gothic film *Blue Velvet* comes from mundane statements which, when filtered by his personal vision, appear weird, but still oddly familiar, just as the opening shots of flowers against a white picket fence and a waving fireman seem filtered and unnatural, and yet commonplace. One such mundane statement comes from Jeff (Kyle Mclachlan), the film's protagonist, as he woos Sandy (Laura Dern): "Yeah . . . You're a mystery . . . I like you . . . very much." The "line," in all its banality, conflicts with Sandy's apparent obviousness. She is the perfect pretty high school senior girl, dates a football player, favors pastel sundresses, and is flattered by and responsive to the attentions of handsome college man Jeff. Dad is a local police detective and Mom helps her get ready for dates. But despite her appearance, we never learn much about what Sandy is like underneath the surface; and in the world of *Blue Velvet* what is hidden under the surface can be most fascinating—and horrifying.

It is Sandy, specifically her look, that I propose to focus on as a crucial element in the film. Many feminist theorists have argued that the woman in film never has access to the "gaze." Beginning with this assumption, Ann Kaplan is led to ask: "First, is the gaze *necessarily* male? . . . Could we structure things so that women own the gaze? If this were possible, would women want to own the gaze?"[1] In this case, of course, the concept of "gaze" is deployed metaphorically to refer to power, especially the power to control sexuality. Still, the act of looking within a film is frequently invoked (quite concretely) as it pertains to men looking at women and seldom the other way around. Judith Mayne asks: "How are the relations of seeing, the relation of a person looking and a person looked at, power-bound? As film viewers, we have spent more time than we realize watching men and women look at each other, and, most emphatically, watching men watching women."[2] *Blue Velvet* offers a case study in how women watch men and how the relation of a person looking and a person looked at may depict formulations other than control and power (scopophilia and fetishism, as Laura Mulvey has described them[3]).

Blue Velvet is particularly relevant to such concerns because of its approach to all of its content. An ordinary cinematic subject (boy solves mystery and wins girl) is presented not as something natural and fulfilling, but in a dark, multileveled—we might even say twisted—way, encouraging the spectator to question his/her reactions to this standard material. It also provides striking examples of several varieties of looking. One woman, Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini), is both a victim and an appropriator of the traditionally considered "male gaze." Her opposite, the mysterious Sandy, offers an alternative type of looking. Sandy appears for the first time in the film by emerging from complete darkness. This stunning shot hints at her mysteriousness and unknowability; we don't understand where she has come or how she got there, either physically or psychically. Sandy's gaze is a critical feature of *Blue Velvet,* but to a great extent the film elides her nature, takes her participation for granted. It would be best to begin then, not with her, but with the more obvious focus of the film—the hero's activities and personality—and return later to the more complex problems that Sandy's simplicity raises.

Although Sandy's psychology is never examined, the importance of delving down to find hidden things is emphasized early in the film. At the end of the first scene the camera descends from a full shot of a front yard to a

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Although Sandy's psychology is never examined, the importance of delving down to find hidden things is emphasized early in the film. At the end of the first scene the camera descends from a full shot of a front yard to a

close-up of slimy insects squirming beneath blades of grass. This examining descent is a visual analogue to psychoanalytic theory and the idea of delving into a person's unconscious to understand and explain feelings and behaviors—a theory that pervades the film and one which I will draw on in my analysis. Lynch's own explanation of his creative process is, perhaps deliberately, an illustration of how to avoid the modifications of what Freudians call "secondary revision" acting on our thoughts as they make themselves available: "I strictly go by ideas that come to me. And, I really feel that ideas when you catch them have a tremendous amount of power. Maybe it's a fuzzy sort of glimpse of it, but if you start writing you realize that you actually saw a lot more at first than you thought you did and these things start unfolding. And then, the trick is to translate them as true as possible to the original thing and they, I think, maintain a power, if you do that."[4]

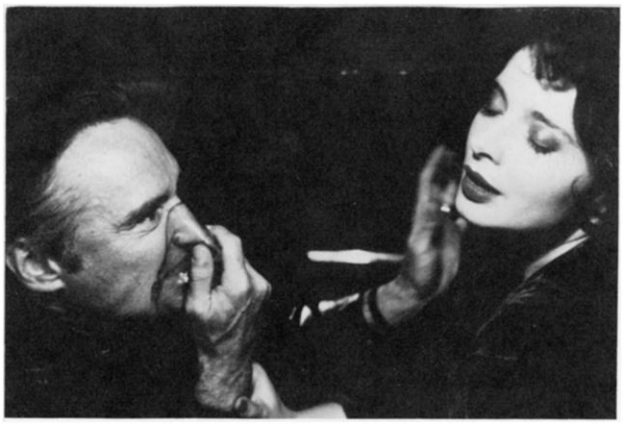
Blue Velvet examines the hidden, the inside, not only of a small town (Lumberton), but also the unconscious of young Jeff. His investigation of a local ear-severing mystery is also an investigation of self. The film begins with Jeff's father who, while watering the lawn, is mysteriously stricken. This removal of the father is the first of many Oedipal aspects of the story. Except for a few brief scenes in which he utters but one line, Jeff's father is literally "out of the picture." Returning from a hospital visit with his incapacitated father, Jeff discovers an ear which he immediately hands over to a local police officer and neighbor, Detective Williams. Jeff's curiosity is aroused, however, and we zoom into an extreme close-up of the severed ear. The camera movement echos that of the descent into the grass. We go inside the ear, inside Jeff's mind, and it is not until the final sequence, when the camera zooms out of an extreme close-up of Jeff's ear, that we will return to relative normality.

After an unfruitful interview with Williams, Jeff meets Williams's eavesdropping daughter Sandy outside the family home. She tells him she knows something about the ear and gives him the address of a nightclub singer named Dorothy who lives near-by—who, she believes, is somehow involved in the case. It is this information that impels Jeff to sneak into Dorothy's apartment to spy on her. He learns that she is being used as a sex slave by badman Frank

The woman's gaze: Laura in BLUE VELVET

Booth (Dennis Hopper) who has kidnapped her husband and son. Jeff's curiosity soon enmeshes him in the intrigue. By the end of the film, he has had an affair with Dorothy, killed Frank, and won Sandy's love.

Jeff's initial foray into Dorothy's apartment sets the stage for a graphic acting out of the Oedipal conflict. Throughout the film, Dorothy is set up as a mother figure. We first see her talking on the phone to her young son. When she appears, much later, naked and battered, Sandy's startled boyfriend asks Jeff, "Is that your mother?" Her apartment even has a red color and curved entry reminiscent of a womb. Similarly, the evil Frank is associated with Jeff's own father. In a subjective thought sequence, Jeff sees his father's reflection distorted by a curved mirror; this image is immediately followed by a shot of Frank. The noise Frank makes breathing out of a gas mask recalls the sound of Jeff's father as he lies, connected to medical equipment, in his hospital bed. It is the sexual activity of this strange couple—Dorothy/mother, Frank/father—that Jeff sees while peeping out of a closet. This scene clearly invokes Freud's "primal scene," when the small child discovers his parents making love. It begins when Jeff, while hiding in the closet, watches as Dorothy arrives at the apartment alone, receives a phone call, and undresses. The dialogue in this sequence emphasizes the con-



What Jeff sees: the primal scene

nection between looking and power. Discovering Jeff in the closet, Dorothy forces him at knifepoint to tell her, "What did you see?" She angrily asks, "How many times have you sneaked into girls' apartments and watched them undress?" Wielding a phallic knife, Dorothy then appropriates this controlling gaze; she orders Jeff to strip so she can look at him. Kneeling in front of him, the knife poised threateningly at his crotch, Dorothy arouses her victim while ordering him not to touch her or look at her. She turns the tables on him by denying him his look, forcing him to appear naked and vulnerable, and appropriating a male gaze and sexuality, here clearly associated with violence.

The scene is interrupted by Frank's arrival. With Jeff back in the closet, Frank turns the voyeuristic, sadistic gaze back on Dorothy. Ordering her, "Don't look at me," he forces her to display herself. Referring to himself as "baby" and to Dorothy as "mommy," he strikes her and verbally abuses her until he reaches his climax. Hopper's maniacal performance here and throughout the film creates a sense of sadism beyond sanity. Seeing, but unseen, Jeff watches this brutalization unprotestingly.

The Oedipal configuration suggested in this early scene will be completed later; Jeff has sex with Dorothy and, at the film's climax, kills Frank.

Additional scenes reinforce the conception of these three characters as a family, offering parodic versions of typical small-town family scenes: father returning from work; mom, dad and son visiting friends; and the family drive.

As Jeff becomes more deeply involved with the Lumberton underworld, he simultaneously develops a relationship with good girl Sandy. Although she provides the initial impetus for Jeff's investigation, she remains outside real participation. She agrees to "help" Jeff on two occasions, but each time her assistance is annulled. Jeff first asks her to create a diversion at Dorothy's apartment; as she approaches the apartment, however, another visitor beats her to the door. "He did my job for me," explains Sandy. That night she offers to wait outside the apartment building and signal Jeff when Dorothy approaches, allowing him time to hide, but just as she honks her horn, Jeff drowns out the sound with a toilet flush. Sandy's active participation is completely undermined.

However, Sandy cannot be dismissed as merely passive and ineffectual. She is an important player in Jeff's psychosexual development as a counterpart to/replacement of mother figure Dorothy. The nature of dependence of the infant on the mother consists of a paradoxical situation where the mother provides a secure "holding environment" while simultaneously presenting the infant with stimuli. Because the infant psychologically anticipates this care, the mother initially is internalized as an object from which he/she does not distinguish him/herself. It is only through the object's symbolic destruction that the infant can discover "externality."[5]

Jeff must free himself from the suffocating, maternal love of Dorothy, to take his place with the external-object mother, Sandy. At the end of the film, Dorothy is destroyed, hauled off in an ambulance with a gas mask which echoes Frank's. She appears briefly, recovered, in a sort of coda to the film, but she no longer has a connection to our hero Jeff. The resolution of Jeff's Oedipal conflict—and the slow zoom out from his ear which symbolically removes us from his unconscious—finds him happily coupled with Sandy.

Through his renunciation of the omnipotent internal-object mother, he assumes a position to make use of the external object—in this case, Sandy. Sandy is further positioned in a maternal role by her relationship to her football playing boyfriend Mike, yet another "bad" father (he tries to attack Jeff and deny Sandy the ability to speak) and by her status at the conclusion as prospective mother to Jeff's children. Jeff is the little boy fluctuating between the two mothers—just as the infant fluctuates between the security of the holding environment and the stimulation of desire.

As this formulation unfolds in *Blue Velvet,*

an implicit tension develops between Sandy and Dorothy, related but not limited to a sexual rivalry. After Frank brutalizes Dorothy, Jeff attempts to cover her with a fringed shawl which she pushes away, saying, "No, I don't like that." Later, for her big date with Jeff, Sandy will wear a sundress of similar material. This tension reaches its apex when Jeff and Sandy discover Dorothy, naked and beat-up outside on Jeff's front lawn. They drive her to Sandy's house to call for an ambulance, and Sandy begins to apprehend Jeff's sexual relationship with Dorothy. Betrayed, her mouth distorted in anger, Sandy slaps Jeff and sends him away.

Until now we have dwelt exclusively on Jeff's psychological development. This crucial scene, where Sandy's look results in knowledge and action, appropriately signals an alternative approach. I will now concentrate on Sandy and her look, returning to this moment of revelation to see it, perhaps, from a different perspective.

Sandy's "look," directed throughout *Blue Velvet* almost exclusively at Jeff, can be divided into two major functions which may operate simultaneously: investigation and affirmation. Agreeing to help Jeff investigate the woman on Lincoln Boulevard, Sandy utters a line transfigured by context to belie itself. Having offered to break a date with boyfriend Mike so she can accompany Jeff on a spy mission *cum* dinner date, Sandy announces, "Just so you understand. I love Mike." The context, her previous statements, and her delivery all serve to undercut this assertion; the line, contrary to its content, serves to highlight the growing attraction between Jeff and Sandy. Set against this attraction is Sandy's reluctance and doubt about Jeff's plan to spy on Dorothy in her apartment. Before parting, Sandy announces the subject of her own investigation, saying, "I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert." This question again connects Jeff to the Oedipus myth. Like Oedipus, who discovers that his country's blight is the result of his own perversion, Jeff will learn that he is both detective *and* pervert. He playfully replies, "That's for me to know and you to find out." In fact, this ostensible investigation of the severed ear is as revealing of his psychic self as it is of small-town sex crimes. Sandy's inquiry at this moment reflects his own concerns.

Tania Modleski gives a vivid description of this female inquiry which seeks to determine if a man, the object of possible affections, is good or bad, worthy or vile, a detective (innocent) or a pervert (guilty). "The Harlequin heroine probes for the secret underlying the masculine enigma, while the reader outwits the heroine in coming up with the 'correct' interpretation of the puzzling actions and attitudes of the man. In Gothics the heroine, in the classic paranoid manner, broods over the slightest fluctuation in the hero's emotional temperature or facial expression, quick to detect in these alterations possible threats to her very life."[6] Modleski discusses the Gothic novel and the heroine's often neurotic paranoia as she turns an investigative look on the man with whom she is coupled—as wife, fiancée, servant. "She tries to convince herself that her suspicions are unfounded, that, since she loves him, he must be trustworthy and that she will have failed as a woman if she does not implicitly believe in him."[7]

Aside from her jeopardized affections, an additional motivation to continue to "believe in him" is her own status: generally at his mercy. Being either economically or legally as well as emotionally bound, she has little choice but to "stand by her man."

The same conflict appears frequently in fairy tales where a princess is expected to love and be faithful to the male although he be in monstrous form (beast, frog, disfigured). If she accepts him and loves him unconditionally, she can avert disaster (his blindness, death or perpetual disfigurement). If Sandy is not exactly a princess, she is cast somewhat in this role. In one scene—the only time when she and Jeff are in the car together that she drives—Sandy relates a fairy tale-like dream she had about robins bringing happiness to Earth. In this scene, she is the blonde fairy-tale princess and the Gothic heroine, who must continue to love and trust her man despite appearances.

In *Blue Velvet,* the test comes in the scene discussed earlier when Sandy discovers Jeff's liaison with Dorothy. Jeff is not a beast or a frog or even a brooding aristocrat with a madwoman wife in the attic, but Sandy does see him clutched by a naked, battered nightclub singer who is evidently his lover.

Sandy's anger, which causes her to slap Jeff, is perhaps partly sexual jealousy, but primarily the result of seeing the monstrousness that had been hidden. Her perfect fairy-tale dream has

been tainted by his true nature. ("This hurts my dream," she laments to herself in a later scene after forgiving him over the telephone.) She has investigated him, the results are not all that she had hoped, but having commited to him (she tells him she loves him at a party earlier) she will continue to stand by him. This duality within Jeff's nature reinforces his Oedipal identification: he is the site of evil and the revealer of evil as well.

In her discussion of the woman's enquiring look, Judith Mayne has described how an alliance with a man authorizes the woman's investigations.[8] Sandy is the catalyst, Jeff the authority in an alliance they form. Their common investigation is characterized by two notable aspects. First, it is his nature that is the subject of the project. Although he allegedly hopes to solve a possible murder, the story's unfolding reveals much about his psychological conflicts and serves to advance and coalesce his relationships. We see the violence and disorder hidden inside this outwardly virtuous young man. Taunted by Dorothy, he succumbs to an impulse to strike her during love-making. The association of violence and sex is later reprised when, appearing obviously bruised at the breakfast table, he cautions his inquisitive Aunt Barbara, "I love you, but you're going to get it." Although Jeff is shown as being repelled by his actions with Dorothy, this later scene suggests that his cruel impulses are just beneath the surface and even motivate seemingly innocent statements to elderly relatives.

This decision to study the male, like so much of the film, reflects psychoanalytic theory which for the most part attempts to understand the formation of the male while ignoring, or grafting on in an unlikely way, the formation of the female. In this sense, Sandy is a mystery, as Jeff points out.

Second, his investigative behavior is characterized by action: he drives around, takes pictures, talks to people, gets beat up, all in a traditionally active, masculine way. Conversely, her behavior is almost entirely passive. She understands things by intuition, by looking and listening. Instead of a crystal ball, she gazes into Jeff's eyes, she watches his expressions as he drives, she even stares at a door behind which Jeff is talking to her father.

This investigative look offers, if not exactly subjectivity for women, at least some free play in their positioning. The fact that women in films generally employ this look to investigate men reflects a woman's powerlessness and the importance of knowing the man before it is too late (a point usually marked by the marriage ceremony). It is not simply paranoia that motivates the investigative look, but a genuine need for information.

Despite the importance of this function, when Sandy looks at Jeff in *Blue Velvet* it is clear that something besides investigation is going on. There is a sense of appreciation and participation that Sandy conveys with her look and Jeff cultivates through his behavior. This corresponds with the second function of her look: affirmation.

When Jeff and Sandy meet for the first time in the film, Jeff performs a little stunt he calls "the chicken walk" for Sandy. The scene recalls other instances of male display: juggling, card tricks, fighting, fast driving, and excessive eating performances. Sandy's response to what can only be considered a ridiculous exhibition is to laugh and say, "That's kind of interesting." Like her previous statement about loving Mike, circumstances, line delivery, and the actual composition serve to undercut Sandy's remark, revealing it as a lie. Sandy, like the audience, does not find it interesting, but silly. Her desire to encourage and praise—to cheerlead for Jeff—and his need to receive these attentions are set up in this scene. In addition to her words, she will encourage and praise him through her look. Here, and throughout the rest of the film, she will focus an affirming gaze on Jeff as he speaks, dances, drives, etc., constantly encouraging him through her attention, although at times her words may become cautionary.

Sandy is like the cinema-goer who wishes to preserve all films as good objects despite their individual fallibility.[9] In this case, Jeff is the proposed good object, and Sandy maintains him as such through her appreciative and attentive manner. Just as the investigative look offers at least a possibility of woman as subject, this affirming look offers a possibility of audience identification with the woman character. Sandy is concerned with Jeff's "performance" and committed to him remaining good and pleasurable, just as the audience is similarly concerned with the film's "performance." In one scene, Sandy's status as audience is rein-

forced. Jeff has just proposed a stakeout of Frank Booth's apartment building. Instead of letting the action unfold, Lynch cuts to Jeff and Sandy. Jeff relates what happened over shots of the stakeout. These shots are played for Sandy's enlightenment, just as the film plays for our benefit.

In another sense, though, we must question the implications of this passive observation, as opposed to active doing, for the woman in film. This type of relating, serving to bind the couple through their joint interest in some common endeavor, has been typically considered to be dependent and regressive. However, it is possible to view this "greater tendency for affiliativeness,"[10] which we see in Sandy's tenacious affirmation of Jeff, in a less loaded way. Through identification with the caretaking mother, the female child develops a "sense of self (which) derives from the individual interacting within a relationship rather than by separating."[11] Sandy's affirming look, then, can relate to her role as external-object mother to Jeff and also to her desire for affiliativeness developed through identification with her own mother. That the common endeavors that generally bind the couple are his and the burden for maintaining the relationship hers is clearly not a positive aspect, yet the concept of affiliativeness, nurturance, and interaction can be seen as a valuable alternative to the appropriation of the male gaze. This appropriation is not necessarily a viable alternative, or even a desirable one.

This look of affirmation, like the investigative look, is not, of course, unique to *Blue Velvet,* but can be found throughout film, television, and other media such as the publicity poster. The poster for *Saturday Night Fever,* to offer just one example, depicted a white-suited John Travolta looking confidently at the viewer. His female partner clings to his side while gazing intently up at his face. The question is not whether this stereotyped construction of roles exists, but whether its identification and study can offer any possibilities for either an alternative film reading or film practice. *Blue Velvet* offers traditional constructions of men looking at women and women looking at men, but by virtue of its power, quirkiness, and difference, particularly in the realm of tone, the established romantic couple that is presented in the end cannot be taken for granted. Sandy's irony operates like that of the opening shots. Why do these common images, this simple girl draw such nervous laughter? Perhaps a barely perceptible filter on the flowers, a slight slow motion to the fireman's wave, a mild angularity in Sandy's features are enough to throw us off-kilter. Despite the apparent simplicity, we know that all is not as it should be. We are confronted with mystery. The scene of the women fixing lunch in the kitchen while the men garden does not necessarily depict paradise—as the suspiciously mechanical-looking robin that brings happiness so clearly suggests by bringing a dead insect as well.

But there is still one more problem. Like the film, this analysis ends with a hero fully plumed, his psychic self dissected like a frog, and a heroine who remains a mystery. As played by Laura Dern, Sandy is likable yet enigmatic. This accomplished, "up-and-coming" actress has spent three films discovering romantic love: as the blind girl who "sees" a deformed boy's true beauty in *Mask;* as a teen-ager allegorically awakening to her sexual desires in *Smooth Talk;* and in *Blue Velvet,* finally wanting to settle down with the man of her dreams (or, rather, the man in Lynch's dreams). While Jeff's psychosexual development has been rigorously depicted, Sandy remains a mystery. Sandy looks, but although she is firmly established as the sexual partner—as Dorothy is established as the mother—she is hardly available for feminist appropriation. Investigation and affiliativeness are valuable and valid, but perhaps it is time the gaze shifted.

In a late scene in *Blue Velvet,* Sandy is shown reflected in, but turned away from, a mirror in her pink bedroom as she speaks via telephone to Jeff. Her worried questions reveal that she wonders what he is doing, whether they have a future together. Sandy's failure is that she never turns around and looks at herself.

—TRACY BIGA

VOYAGE TO CYTHERA

Director: Theodore Angelopoulos. Script: Angelopoulos, Th. Vaitinos, and Antonin Guerra. Photography: Georges Arvanatis. Music: Helen Karaindrou. Produced by A Productions, ZDF, Channel 4, Greek TV, and Center of Greek Cinema.

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nounced by the admirable *Traveling Players,* but little noticed in its time—almost ten years ago. Angelopoulos is one of the true consistent *auteurs* of contemporary film-making. A captivating visual beauty revealed itself in his political films, challenging both aesthetic structures and thematic content. History and power are in the center of his universe, where the harms of all kinds of totalitarian ideology are clearly manifest. However, his ironic wisdom avoids didacticism in favor of a personal poetic meditation, an evocative epic and lyrical reflection on the history of Greece.

Traveling has been a central metaphor for the films of Angelopoulos; it's almost as if his imagination only awakens "on the road." But he travels with the audacity and assurance of a king. The landscape and its history seem to welcome him, as do the mysterious gods. (After all, in his films aren't we near Olympus?) Coming after *The Traveling Players,* the title of his new film immediately suggests the direction of this new exploration. Cythera, in Greek mythology, is the isle of dreams where one can dedicate oneself to happiness (or the search for it); it thus represents all that imagination creates. But for "homo politicus"—as we all of course are—the imaginary journey cannot be a romantic idyll: it brings along with it specific responsibilities, forebodings, and failures. And so, even though Angelopoulos's accent has shifted, the décor changed, he has not really departed from his earlier path.

The structure of *Voyage to Cythera* is a masterful presentation of the two worlds of reality and imagination, serving to confront them, shuffle them, and fuse them together in a dazzling display. At the first level of the story, the hero is a director, Alexander, whose journey takes him through the twisting and tortuous path of creating a film. Internal anxiety and uncertainty drive him on. His principal preoccupation consists in asking himself how to give form to the shapeless, to choose from amongst the endless alternatives the world offers. But Angelopoulos does not restrict his *8-1/2* to this particular conflict; he does not reduce the drama to a single dilemma. Guided by the journey metaphor, he displays the story, places it in time, and incites us to travel magically; he unveils the pitfalls of certainty and doubt and calls upon us to live a new adventure.

We are thus on the move, replete with fresh horses, we are always on the move.

One morning, no different from any other morning, our hero wakes up and goes to work at the dream factory: among the flashy movie sets, during the familiar routines, the armada of collaborators swarm, rehearse, and profane the fragility of the vision. But already "I'm losing the rhythm"—like Alexander more than once during the film—and I must stop to note that the opening is more finely woven. The first image, like a hint of a vague and faraway tune, awakens a memory from the past, from the years of World War II: a child—the hero himself as a child or is it already his imagination which confuses the past and dreams?—taunts a German soldier with the foolhardy impudence of the innocent, and then runs away at full speed through a silent labyrinth of deserted streets and leprous walls. It's a startling fragment whose enigmatic concentration introduces the always present historical sensibility of Angelopoulos; the events of the film never unfold in a foggy poetic abstraction.

So it's under the double sign of imagination and daily life that the opening of *Voyage to Cythera* is offered to our gaze. The film proposes to reveal the sources, the physical and geographic roots of the artistic inspiration. We witness a decisive moment: Alexander is mesmerized by the face of an old man he notices by chance. This glimpse sets him on the path to the film within Angelopoulos's film—a hypothetical, virtual film. And once he has entered upon this path he experiences a sort of vertigo, which we also come to share. The moment is elusive, the transition so subtly accomplished that we realize it only after the fact, when we are already caught up too, and like him uncertain of the very delicate boundary between the world of reality and the world of the imaginary. This interpenetration is the essence of Angelopoulos: for him, the two have exactly the same weight and the same quality. The creative work is also the life of the creator; it has a continuous physical reality of its own. Imagination is not a holiday excursion, it is not a separate realm reserved for illuminations which are above or outside of physical reality; it is inextricably linked with the

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A few biographical details on Theodore Angelopoulos: Born in Athens, 1935. Attended IDHEC (was dropped for "conformism"), returned to Greece in 1964, when Papandreou came to power; started writing film criticism. Short: *Emission* (1968). Features: *Reconstitution* (1970), *Days of '36* (1972), *The Traveling Players* (1974–75), *Hunters* (1977), *Alexander the Great* (1980), *Voyage to Cythera* (1984).

VOYAGE TO CYTHERA, *directed by Theodore Angelopoulos*

unerasable presence of an intruding reality whose richness is everpresent.

The film Alexander's making is also the story of a particular journey leading us from the past to the present, from one unknown to another. The beginning and the end have a disconcerting open-ended structure, but the journey is rooted in a concrete historical and socio-psychological reality. This journey has nothing metaphysical in it: it is a painful human destiny, cruelly determined by the long wars as well as by the short truces of our century.

We follow the coming home of an old man. Having spent his youth in the resistance and as a partisan, he was then forced to emigrate during the dictatorship of the Colonels. After more than thirty years he attempts to return home. How does one build a bridge to span thirty years of silence? Will one find again a common language for reunion, will one find enough reserves of feeling and thought to mend the torn fabric of continuity? His encounters do not bode well. The gap is too large to be easily bridged. Ties with family, old neighbors, and relations with authorities threaten to rupture. Too much political history has passed by in his absence. He finds himself a stranger.

One could say there is nothing surprising in this, that it's almost to be expected. But what's at stake is not the result, it is the experience, the pitiless process that obliges us to live out the inevitable. One of the fatal characteristics of the voyage is that the traveler cannot determine his itinerary. Crushed by the burden of this incessant tension, he must experience the painful sensation of feeling himself a stranger, and endure the merciless harassments of the authorities. To be deprived of his rights in every domain is the fate of our Ulysses. He has no more right to his country, nor to his abandoned land and home, nor even to his own death, which is imposed upon him from without, by the judgment of others, as a punishment.

Why is the verdict so harsh? Is it due to the sin of infidelity, because he veered from the road that others have followed? We are probably nearer to the truth if we say that this fate illustrates the implacable social reality of our times, that human beings are no longer in control of their own lives. We lose this power if we belong to the flock, but also if we struggle for a new order. The terrible irony is that it is through his desire to serve the people that the old man ends up alienated from them.

The portrait of the hero is exceptionally powerful. The lean and wizened old man executes his task with an imperturbable seriousness. From the first moment, we have the impression that he mechanically obeys the secret and heartless dictates of his destiny. He is incapable of being warm and open. "I have never seen him laugh, not once," says his daughter, no doubt

because the uprooting of exile brings with it a sullen coldness, added to the frustrated rigidness acquired so often by political activists. The exile's forceful character, hardened by wars, has become austere indifference, arid self-centeredness. Ideals, feelings, familial love, the sweetness of a known landscape—they have eluded him. He is left with a few sparse memories, snatches of a melody sung with a buddy, a modest suitcase and a violin. Are the meanings of these symbols too obvious? Maybe. Fortunately, Angelopoulos does not insist on their meaning, does not burden them with a superfluous underlining. The objects accompany the hero like the recurrent adjectives of the ancient epic poems, and their presence simply serves as a reminder of the impossibility of integration, the physical reality of exclusion.

For the paradox of the old man's journey is that he never arrives. Obviously he wants to rest, to find his home again, but he is unable to come to rest before the complete rejection. Staying on the move proves to be an implacable necessity. He must keep going, always keep going. At first it is because he wants to see everything; his curiosity propels him. He wants to rediscover the décor of the past, the old house, the land, the mountains where he spent his years in the resistance. Then he must move on because he is forced to by the authorities, because he must reach the calvary of exclusion. He must respect the imposed stops. He seems then to float between heaven and earth, in a no man's land, on a more than symbolic raft where he awaits a fate stripped of all hope.

But the story of the old man is only the core of another, or perhaps its skin. A fugue is hidden in a fugue—one emerges from the other, reality and poetry subtly overlap. For instance, in the film within the film, Alexander, the director hero, plays the part of the old man's son. One does not have to be a stubborn Freudian to foresee the inevitable drama simmering in the accusatory relationship of the father and his son. The relentless portrayal is striking. For the father, despite his tragic lot, is unable to inspire compassion and indulgence from his own kin. "You are a fossil," says a neighbor, who cannot forgive him for having always sown unrest, "You don't exist. Long past are the times where you would ride through the mountains with your gun. You are a fossil." The odious judgment seems painfully true, for his hands are empty, and he will leave nothing of value as his legacy. The accusation is valid not only for the present, but also for the past, and for all the time in between. What in him is worthy of respect? His stubbornness, his dubious courage which made him abandon his family and his home with no hesitation? When people see the sad shadow of his former self, they pass their bitter judgment. "You've never thought of others," says his daughter. "You and your generation. You fought a revolution, you joined the partisans, and you took off." He who left does not have the right to come back so easily. "Why did you come back?" he is asked, and the old man can offer no answer.

The leftist, the resistance fighter, has become an anachronistic being, on the fringe of real life. If the subject of the film within the film is the farewell to the father, indeed to the generation of World War II fathers glorified for so long, then this farewell is doubly upsetting. Beyond the theme of separation, the film is about the tragic poverty of that which is passed from father to son. Alexander is particularly troubled because the loss does not seem to bother him. His loss consists in not really feeling any sense of loss.

Why did Alexander make a hero out of the father? Because we can, after all, perceive a deep affinity between the two. He doesn't content himself with settling a score with "the other," with him who is different: he also has to come face to face with that which resembles himself, even though this resemblance makes him uncomfortable. The marginal character of the exile makes Alexander see what is marginal in himself. Doubtless, the old man cut himself off from life, but didn't a similar thing happen to the generation of the son, this generation of lost illusions which is Alexander's? Let's go further: the shadowiness, the need to isolate, the arid solitude, aren't these inherent in the fate of the artist? Moreover, what became of *his* great ideals? Where is Cythera, the isle of happiness? Finally, all that is left for him is to explain and understand powerlessness. And so the two poles confront each other: the powerlessness of the father and the struggle of the artist, his son, to name it. With the father's death, the artist's journey does reaches an end. For creating, like departing, is also dying a little.

The emotional journey of the film is that of

the inevitable progression of grief. The voyage of Alexander does not take him closer to clarity, but toward darker regions, through three different circles. The first circle is the story of the embarkation, Alexander leaving his daily environment, the second one is the creation of the dreamed hero, the meeting with the unknown father in the classic situations and conflicts of the film within the film; and the last circle focuses on the relationship between the artist and the old man. The voyage is an act of self-criticism, the analysis of Alexander's creative power and a vision, a meditation on the surrounding world. As the artist's reflection on the story begins to dominate, the shadows of solitude, anguish, and numerous deceptions are also projected. In the journey of the hero in *Voyage to Cythera,* the entire tragedy of all human undertaking is implied: the need to depart from the known, the desire to understand the unknown, the dark—the challenge of freedom, "the passion for the possible," in the words to Ricoeur, and the prize, the curse, and the burden of freedom.

But, under this classic horizontal structure, or rather inside of it, we might discover another structural concept that orders the rich material. As we have seen, imagination and reality mix, reflect each other. In the film that Alexander makes, he is present as a son, but his lover, an actress, also appears as his sister. Reality intervenes in all fiction. Inspiration digs for its treasure from the well of real life, fiction is the modified face of reality. The presence of reality within fiction results in a specific quality and a stimulating difference. The introduction of real-life characters, with its slight but unrelenting distancing, creates an incomparable effect.

The keeping up of this oscillation, this ambiguity loaded with meaning, is Angelopoulos's originality. Because nothing would be easier than merely reversing the common hierarchy and instead giving free rein to the interior realm of the imagination. We have seen it abused in countless films with flashbacks and dream sequences. But Angelopoulos refuses any hierarchy, any rigid delineation. What unfolds under our gaze does not take place in the past tense usually used in stories, but the could-be (or will-be), intriguing and undefined, colors the action. The journey remains open thanks to the uncommon play of the conditional and the future, and to a slight lag between the two. One example only, and a wonderful one: when the old man and his family go for dinner in the abandoned and closed-up house of his ancestral village, plates *already* filled with soup, laid neatly on an *already* set table, provoke a touch of the unreal, a willful disturbance, which remind us of the presence of imagination, of the work of fiction. The subtle fissure in the story must suggest the unreal.

By using the conditional, Angelopoulos thus creates a new sense of time, different from that of his earlier films. The overlapping of different layers of time, the free manipulation of time, have always dominated his *écriture.* But, in *Voyage to Cythera,* a new complexity enriches the dual texture of the story. On one side, the action unfolds according to a clear and easy-to-follow chronology; but this horizontal development does not prevent another movement. This one is vertical, it represents the subjective time of imagination or, rather, the intemporality of the imaginary. In *The Traveling Players,* memory and history, historical consciousness, whether individual or collective, are intertwined amidst significant social and political turning points. Here, the historicity of time, the fusion of past and present cease; we watch the destruction of the walls which separate the *is* and the *could-be,* the *is* and the *will-be.* For example, the meals are prepared and offered to the protagonists but they are never actually eaten. We have the sensation of entering a musical space in which the constellation of instants has as much importance as the design of the melody. The rhythm is called upon to express the wanderings of the interior journey. It is not by chance that twice during his peregrination Alexander wonders if he hasn't lost the rhythm. One, two, three, he counts—is he trying to measure with steps the pulse of the film in progress? In any event he controls the precision of his creative gestures.

As in the other films of Angelopoulos, this time also the rhythmic accent is accompanied by a deliberate restraint. No other director takes such a calculated risk with the danger of slowness. But the *ritenuto* is an organic part of his composition; it is responsible for evoking the painful sensation of unresolvedness, of braking time, of inciting himself to concentration.

The new direction of Angelopoulos's journey required new techniques and a slightly different *écriture.* His use of the *plan-séquence* is certain-

ly dependent on a unique technique; as Gerard Pangon—the French critic—notes justifably, it undertakes new functions, foremost that of "going without a break from objectivity to subjectivity and vice versa." But maybe there is something else at work here. In *The Traveling Players,* the tension of the *plan-séquence* came from the fact that the continuity seems to us both threatened and threatening at the same time. At each instant, the field of vision is subjected to unexpected incursions, the aggression of politics and history come through in the images in an unforeseeable manner, according to the murderous whim of the arbitrary. Despite the vulnerability of the image, Angelopoulos could create an incredibly powerful sovereignty thanks to the autonomy of the camera, to the relationship between the camera and space, to the incomparable dignity and beauty of the composition. This beauty always seemed organic with its severe and taut order, not unlike the dignity of the poor. In the new film, this strict discipline, the rhetrical value as such of the *plan-séquence,* the "pride" of the omnipresent camera, seems to be slightly mitigated. The geometrical layout of the frame is also less stringent. The camera is more personal, more supple; because there is greater intimacy the composition exhibits a more tender rigorousness—if those two terms can be linked. The context of the preceding films gave rise to the lucidity of distance for each object; in *Voyage to Cythera,* a rapprochement begins to take shape. It is precisely through this greater suppleness and softer continuity that the expressive force and the depth of feeling reveal themselves. The finer and silkier musical texture is accentuated by the fact that dialogue is consciously neglected. The long silences, the dialogue reduced to snatches of words, accentuate the visual aspect of the work of the imagination, the metaphorical power of pictorial language. What little is said is often repeated as the variations of a musical theme, for example, "it's me," and "rotten apples" or the repetition of the actress's speech at the end of the film. These interior rhymes not only represent a structural principle, but also something about the work of the unconscious, that is to say the work of creation. The forms are imposed on us; after having once given its configuration to a sensation, they become independent and real; thus they continue irresistibly to articulate the chaotic contents of conscience. The repetitions dissolve, circle, and give rise to the illusion of possession: if we recognize a thing, we therefore understand it, thus it has become ours.

The structure that tends to organize, to enclose, imposes itself in the entire composition with more force than before. From the clashing movement in the first images, we arrive at the hero's absolute immobility in the last sequence. Between the two lies the requiem, with its pain, its loss, its acceptance. The last act of the traveler, a man of uncompromising integrity, is to reject not only Ulysses the father, but also Penelope the mother, humiliated and grief-stricken, in order to achieve final solitude, to arrive full circle. The story has reached its end. Cythera is not an island, but the voyage itself.

—YVETTE BIRO

BLACK WIDOW

Director: Bob Rafelson. Script: Ronald Bass. Producer: Harold Schneider. Photography: Conrad L. Hall. Music: Michael Small. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Halfway through *Black Widow,* Alex Barnes (Debra Winger) exclaims to her boss, "Nobody knows why anyone does anything!" In the film, Alex is a Justice Department agent tracking down a woman she suspects of being a serial killer, a "black widow" who marries rich men and then kills them for their money.* Her statement, "Nobody knows why anyone does anything," is Alex's justification of her mission to her boss, but in that it exemplifies the film's point of view toward its material, it also unwittingly underscores *Black Widow's* essential failure in attempting to point out new directions for the genre of *film noir.*

In recent years, films such as *Body Heat* and *The Jagged Edge* have attempted to update *film noir,* most notably by transforming the role of women in the genre. In *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), the femme fatale is clearly the intellectual superior of the man she victimizes, and she also triumphs by escaping punishment

* This woman (played by Theresa Russell) is named variously in the film: as Catherine, the wife of a Mafioso; Marielle, the redheaded "airhead" married to a Texas toy manufacturer; Margaret, a sophisticated anthropologist who becomes a board member of a Seattle museum; Catherine, a sultry playgirl romancing a hotelier in Hawaii. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to her as "Catherine" throughout this review.

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Catherine introduces Alex to Paul, her next victim: BLACK WIDOW

for her deeds. In *The Jagged Edge* (Richard Marquand, 1985), the gender roles are reversed: in it, a woman lawyer falls under the spell of an "homme fatale" and finally exposes him as a murderer. Each in its own way, these two earlier films feature independent professional women as protagonists, establishing a trend in characterization explicitly stated by Catherine in *Black Widow,* when she explains to Alex her tendency to marry rich husbands: "You never really figure you're quite there . . . Well, I used to think of it as my job . . . I was a professional!" In *Black Widow,* both women are portrayed as hard workers: Alex is a workaholic who can hardly bear to be away from her computer, and we see Catherine with stacks of books as she prepares for her next scam. The particular uniqueness of *Black Widow,* however, is in its rewriting of *film noir* to depict a female investigator pursuing a femme fatale and to portray both women as professionals; it therefore promises an intriguing reassessment of the genre.

The film develops through a series of plot devices that are perhaps too easily recognized as "Hitchcockian" touches. As the fanatical pursuer of the black widow, Alex forms an obsessive fascination with her quarry. After the two women meet, Catherine's dawning awareness of Alex's real mission puts Alex in jeopardy as her next likely victim. And, by the end of the film, Alex is herself accused of Catherine's crimes. These themes of transference of guilt, role reversals, and doublings are signalled visually by the two women being clothed in the same color scheme of red, blue, and black. Perhaps even more explicitly, Alex appears at a party at one point wearing a dress borrowed from Catherine, her hair coiffed by Catherine's own hair-dresser.

Yet the real disappointment in the film is not that it is too predictable in emulating the Hitchcock thriller, but that its apparent attempt to "feminize" the genre proves only to be a cosmetic gimmick at best. In the prototypical *film noir,* the femme fatale's power resides in her enigmatic seductiveness. Once invoked and allowed full play, however, her power must then be nullified through her inevitable defeat. Typically, the male investigator of *film noir* is the agent who, with the authority of law and certitude on his side, assigns guilt and exacts punishment. In *Black Widow,* since the role of the investigator is given over to a woman, we might expect a corresponding reassessment of the archetype of the femme fatale, but this is not the case. Throughout the film, the archetype is played straight: from the credit sequence, where Catherine is seen (in an intense gigantic close-up) applying eye make-up before appearing in dark glasses, blonde hair, and black mink, through her various other incarnations, this film is no different from its predecessors in exploiting full-blown the iconography of the femme fatale, based as it is on the fetishism of the female body and the mythology of woman's unbridled sexuality and her willingness to use it to control men.

In the prototypical *film noir,* the femme fatale is often implicitly defined through her contrast with her opposite type, the domesticated wife/virgin figure. *Black Widow* preserves a version of this good/bad woman split through the contrast between Alex and Catherine. While Catherine, appearing variously as a blonde or redhead, exemplifies "feminine" allure, Alex is depicted as the frumpy brunette, dressed in an ill-fitting coat, carelessly slung scarf, and clumsy boots. Alex (who, significantly, goes by the masculine form of her name, Alexandra) is truly "one of the boys," taking target practice with her "piece" from Sears, playing a mean game of poker with men in a smoke-filled office, and turning down overtures from her boss and a co-worker. So, if Catherine's professional skills stem from her unique ability to adapt her femininity to the fantasies of each of her male victims, Alex's professional zeal is concomitant with her resolute denial of her sexuality. As her boss accuses her one day, "When was the last time you rolled in here late Monday because you had a big weekend?" Against this background, which clearly polarizes the two women as sexual/asexual, the apparent parallel between them as professional women retreats into irrelevance.

On an even more serious level, the characterization of the two women in terms of a "split" has implications for our understanding of their psychology, and more importantly, on how we understand the nature of Alex's obsession with Catherine. The fact of Alex's obsession is addressed quite explicitly in the film. After Alex has quit her job and sold her possessions to continue to hunt down Catherine, her boss tells her, "She's obsessed with killing, and you're obsessed with her." At the end of the film, when Alex is in jail, Catherine explains to her that psychological tests are being done because "they seem to think that your obsession was . . . with me." But why is Alex obsessed? The answer is supplied in the scene in which Alex projects slides of the "black widow" in her apartment. Bathed in the glow of the glamorous images, Alex, clad in an untidy pyjama-top, walks up to the wall and places her hand over the image of Catherine's hand. Then she walks into the bathroom and scrutinizes her face in the mirror. Looking back once more at the slide projections, she tries out a couple of ways of pulling back her hair in the mirror. The scene ends with a long shot of her still standing in front of the mirror, slumped over the sink. This scene dramatizes the moment of cathexis for Alex: unlike the typical male protagonist of *film noir,* whose fascination with the femme fatale fetishes her as an object of desire, Alex, in gazing at the "other" woman, is turned back into an awareness of what she herself lacks. Her obsession with Catherine is thus based on her seeing Catherine as alien to herself, but more importantly, it is symptomatic of her devaluation of herself as an "incomplete" woman. In fact, she voices her feelings of inadequacy by explaining to Catherine what she sees when they are drying themselves by the pool: "We spent most of the day in the pool: you come out looking like that and I look like this . . . I was just wondering why that is." Afterwards, when Catherine invites her to a party, she jokingly asks, "Can I borrow your hair?"

By implication, Alex's lack of physical attractiveness is linked to her excessive devotion to her work. At the same time, it is suggested that her obsession with Catherine, deriving from her envy of Catherine's looks and "feminine" attributes, results from her dissatisfaction with her professional life. Indeed, her frustration becomes explicit when she begs her boss for a field assignment by saying, "It's a job with green windows! Bruce, I've been in this office for six years—this goddam government office with green windows!" Through Alex's outburst, the film explodes the facade of Alex's professionalism and exposes her ease in a man's world as a neurotic denial of life. Again, her boss articulates the film's point of view when he says sarcastically, "Yeah, I know . . . you want excitement. Well, a lot of people don't look to get it all from their jobs. . . ." *Black Widow,* therefore, recasts the obsessive plot of *film noir* in terms of a professional woman's neurotic identification with another woman, one whose "professional" success is explicitly defined in terms of her ability to please men. In this way, Alex's apparently satisfying and autonomous life as a working woman is revealed to be founded on a bedrock of insecurity and frustration.

In the scene where she is caught in a lie by Catherine's husband, the alibi Alex makes up as an apology seems to suggest her unconscious sense of her precarious professional standing, as she explains awkwardly: "I'm sorry, I really

am. See—I'm just starting out, and I thought an article on powerful women might sell to *Cosmo* or *Woman's Daily* . . ." to which Catherine's husband sympathetically responds, "I never had to prove myself like that; it must be hard for you." In the rest of the film, the black widow's entire career is, of course, premised on her unabashed willingness to use deception in order to gain power and wealth. This scene in which Alex deliberately lies establishes a subtle but telling contrast between the two women: by pretending to be a novice writer, Alex not only characterizes Catherine in contrast to herself as a powerful woman, but she also role-plays a woman trying to overcome her feeling of powerlessness by worming herself into an advantageous position apologetically and underhandedly. In other words, Catherine's instinctive drive is to become a powerful woman; for Alex, however, her spontaneous strategy is to adopt the stance of powerlessness.

When her boss tells Alex, "You're not happy—and you deserve to be," he is stating the film's own judgment of her as a character. If we defer to this view of Alex, we naturally accept the alacrity with which she relinquishes her livelihood, and even her own identity, to chase a "phantom." In a symbolic gesture, during the last phase of her pursuit in Hawaii, she burns the luggage tags on which her name is written. We see the further submergence of her identity to Catherine's at the party given by Paul, Catherine's boss, where she shows up in a black strapless dress borrowed from Catherine and sporting a much more fashionable hairdo, the handiwork of Catherine's hairdresser. Seeing in Alex perhaps the suggestive but unconvincing outlines of a black widow, Paul jokingly asks, "I recognize the dress, but who's the woman?" The most sinister enactment of Alex's identification with Catherine, of course, occurs when, instigated by Catherine, Alex becomes Paul's lover.

It is true that there are inherent problems with the film's psychologizing Alex's obsession with Catherine in terms of her sense of incompleteness as a woman. Yet the film still need not have been a total loss from the point of view of its "feminization" of the genre. In *film noir,* the usual strategy is to pose the "good" woman and the "bad" woman as symbolic opposites, abstractions emblematic of the male protagonist's moral conflict. As such, these two types of women effectively inhabit separate worlds in the genre, and the potential of *Black Widow* derives precisely from its unique creation of a plot in which its two women protagonists interact directly with each other in their own right, rather than as mediated through a male psyche. In other words, *Black Widow* eschews the narrative structure of *film noir,* typically dominated by a male point of view, in favor of a narration that alternates between two women's points of view. Despite this de-centered narration, however, the interaction between the two women is, in actuality, only a one-sided affair: while Alex's fascination with Catherine is given plausibility, there is little to convince us that this attraction is mutual. The result is that we see Alex (the more truly "professional" of the two women) as having little to offer Catherine, the "man's woman" who is, in contrast, practicing her variation on the "oldest profession in the world" without any sense of self-consciousness or remorse.

With this, we come back to Alex's declaration that "Nobody knows why anyone does anything!" At the heart of the film's failure is its inability to reach any sort of satisfying insight into Catherine. As the "other" woman in the film, she remains to the end unknown, yet another in the long series of unknowable women in *film noir.* Even if we were to accept the questionable premise by which the film tries to explain Alex's obsession with Catherine, we look in vain for a satisfying explanation of what her friendship with Alex really means for Catherine. To the very end, Catherine remains a cipher to us, as well as to the other characters in the film. Indeed, the film seems to demand our acquiescence to this blindspot at its center, one which Catherine herself invokes in her statement after receiving her wedding gift from Alex (a diamond brooch in the shape of a spider), as she anticipates Alex's unspoken question: "The black widow—she mates and she kills. The question is 'Does she love?' It's impossible to answer that—unless you live in her world." In sum, then, while asking us to question the acuity of Alex's vision (as in the scene where she is blinded by the blue light of a sun-lamp while conducting an interview), the film is resolutely blind to what Catherine's reality might be, so that it has, itself, no insight into the object of Alex's obsession.

In the penultimate scene of the film, Cather-

ine faces Alex from across a partition in the jail where Alex is being held. In her moment of triumh, she tells Alex that "Of all the relationships I'll look back on in 30 years' time, this is the one I'll remember." Here, it seems that we are asked to accept on face value the idea of a reciprocal attraction between the two women. What the film flirts with throughout, of course, is the suggestion of an erotic basis for this attraction. Alex's sexual involvement with Paul, then, might be interpreted either as an expression of her desire *for* Catherine or as her desire *to be* Catherine. On her part, as she searches Alex's room, there is a moment when Catherine picks up one of Alex's handkerchiefs, sniffs its scent, and then holds it tenderly against her cheek. Yet, in keeping with its essential evasiveness in viewing Catherine as a character, the film invokes the possibility of an erotic attraction between the two women only in order to deflate it. When we see Alex, during a scuba diving class, giving Catherine mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in a posture that is almost explicitly sexual, Alex herself undermines the erotic tension in the scene by jokingly asking Catherine, "You're not taking this personally, are you?" And finally, during Catherine's wedding with Paul, when Catherine abruptly grabs Alex and kisses her on the mouth, the brutality of her gesture and the coldness of Alex's response effectively portray her kiss as an act of hostility, not of desire.

At the very end of *Black Widow,* her name cleared and her mission accomplished, Alex walks out of the courthouse into the bright sun. Both her attire (a strapless sundress in a blue and white floral print) and the warm tropical setting show her transformation from the Alex remembered from the beginning of the film, who was habitually clad in a heavy grey coat against the wintry weather. Indeed, Alex has been "feminized": by Paul, her borrowed lover for one night, and by Catherine, the alter ego whose identity she has briefly adopted as her own. Yet, in this ending, it is as difficult to see Alex striding into her "office with green windows" in her new sundress as it is to imagine what kind of alternative future she might be entering. It would seem, then, that the film finds it easier to portray Alex in a milieu she finds incomplete and chafing, harder to place her in one she has worked to create. At the same time, too, *Black Widow* is about intransigence as much as it is about change, for inasmuch as it preserves intact, through Catherine, the archetype of the femme fatale, it has a double plot, in which one woman, found wanting in "feminine" qualities, is impelled toward change, and the other, a creation of male fantasies and fears, is mythologized through those attributes that make her at once inscrutable, dangerous, and enduring.

—MARINA HEUNG

FOREST OF BLISS

A film by Robert Gardner.

"Forest of Bliss" is the title of Robert Gardner's feature-length actuality film which won first prizes at 1986 film festivals in Florence and Dallas. It is also a name given the ancient city of Benares in India, the subject of Gardner's film. But the title is more a mythological allusion and ironic statement than a descriptive caption, for the film centers upon urban death and never pictures a forest.

Like *Dead Birds* (1963), *Rivers of Sand* (1974), and *Deep Hearts* (1978), *Forest of Bliss* depicts the universal human emotions and indigenous social behavior of a human subculture. Gardner always aspires to locate the audience within a relatively closed and remote society and peer behind the surface of ritual. From that standpoint *Forest of Bliss* may be his most successful film.

The ceremonies, cremation, and industries associated with human death in India are the primary subjects of Gardner's camera. Using neither post-dubbed sounds nor off-location images, he chooses the discipline of letting natural sounds and images explain each funereal process without narration or other secondary sound tracks.

While the editing is repetitively flowing, and the camera motion is likewise often gliding, creating the impression of a visual chant, the transcendent style does not conceal content. For example, of the multitude of people depicted, three individuals stand out. The first, a Healer of great compassion and congeniality, waits upon pained and disturbed people at the Durga temple late at night and in his humble home near the main cremation ground. The second, the untouchable King of the cremation ground, passionately executes his hereditary calling to

ine faces Alex from across a partition in the jail where Alex is being held. In her moment of triumh, she tells Alex that "Of all the relationships I'll look back on in 30 years' time, this is the one I'll remember." Here, it seems that we are asked to accept on face value the idea of a reciprocal attraction between the two women. What the film flirts with throughout, of course, is the suggestion of an erotic basis for this attraction. Alex's sexual involvement with Paul, then, might be interpreted either as an expression of her desire *for* Catherine or as her desire *to be* Catherine. On her part, as she searches Alex's room, there is a moment when Catherine picks up one of Alex's handkerchiefs, sniffs its scent, and then holds it tenderly against her cheek. Yet, in keeping with its essential evasiveness in viewing Catherine as a character, the film invokes the possibility of an erotic attraction between the two women only in order to deflate it. When we see Alex, during a scuba diving class, giving Catherine mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in a posture that is almost explicitly sexual, Alex herself undermines the erotic tension in the scene by jokingly asking Catherine, "You're not taking this personally, are you?" And finally, during Catherine's wedding with Paul, when Catherine abruptly grabs Alex and kisses her on the mouth, the brutality of her gesture and the coldness of Alex's response effectively portray her kiss as an act of hostility, not of desire.

At the very end of *Black Widow,* her name cleared and her mission accomplished, Alex walks out of the courthouse into the bright sun. Both her attire (a strapless sundress in a blue and white floral print) and the warm tropical setting show her transformation from the Alex remembered from the beginning of the film, who was habitually clad in a heavy grey coat against the wintry weather. Indeed, Alex has been "feminized": by Paul, her borrowed lover for one night, and by Catherine, the alter ego whose identity she has briefly adopted as her own. Yet, in this ending, it is as difficult to see Alex striding into her "office with green windows" in her new sundress as it is to imagine what kind of alternative future she might be entering. It would seem, then, that the film finds it easier to portray Alex in a milieu she finds incomplete and chafing, harder to place her in one she has worked to create. At the same time, too, *Black Widow* is about intransigence as much as it is about change, for inasmuch as it preserves intact, through Catherine, the archetype of the femme fatale, it has a double plot, in which one woman, found wanting in "feminine" qualities, is impelled toward change, and the other, a creation of male fantasies and fears, is mythologized through those attributes that make her at once inscrutable, dangerous, and enduring.

—MARINA HEUNG

FOREST OF BLISS

A film by Robert Gardner.

"Forest of Bliss" is the title of Robert Gardner's feature-length actuality film which won first prizes at 1986 film festivals in Florence and Dallas. It is also a name given the ancient city of Benares in India, the subject of Gardner's film. But the title is more a mythological allusion and ironic statement than a descriptive caption, for the film centers upon urban death and never pictures a forest.

Like *Dead Birds* (1963), *Rivers of Sand* (1974), and *Deep Hearts* (1978), *Forest of Bliss* depicts the universal human emotions and indigenous social behavior of a human subculture. Gardner always aspires to locate the audience within a relatively closed and remote society and peer behind the surface of ritual. From that standpoint *Forest of Bliss* may be his most successful film.

The ceremonies, cremation, and industries associated with human death in India are the primary subjects of Gardner's camera. Using neither post-dubbed sounds nor off-location images, he chooses the discipline of letting natural sounds and images explain each funereal process without narration or other secondary sound tracks.

While the editing is repetitively flowing, and the camera motion is likewise often gliding, creating the impression of a visual chant, the transcendent style does not conceal content. For example, of the multitude of people depicted, three individuals stand out. The first, a Healer of great compassion and congeniality, waits upon pained and disturbed people at the Durga temple late at night and in his humble home near the main cremation ground. The second, the untouchable King of the cremation ground, passionately executes his hereditary calling to

peddle divine grass and fire to mourners. The third is an exceptionally dutiful priest who celebrates sacred rites at the shrine he maintains near the Ganges.

In Western terms, if such character focus constitutes "plot," then Gardner is telling the story of key actors (physician, undertaker, and clergyman) within the drama of death. However, pictorially, the drama is unique: the huge cremation fire is constantly "fed" sacred wood; the body is ceremonially wrapped, floated to sea on a specifically decorated boat, burned, and then drifts mystically with the wind as ascending ashes. Differences between East and West are more front and center than similarities. If the film, when deconstructed of its stream-of-consciousness imagery, may be said to have this "dramatic story," it is the only narrative. To seek greater narrative continuity, such as climax and denouement, would be far-fetched interpretation; Gardner begins the film with one Indian sunrise and then ends it with the next sunrise—what occurs in between *could* be dream, fantasy, memory, impression, patchwork imagery, or "reality."

However, to close observers of human behavior there is a level of social statement within the film. It tells of a society in which dogs literally eat dogs (the image is unsettling), cows

Family bearing litter in FOREST OF BLISS

mingle openly with people like a protected caste within the hierarchy, and custom is institutionalized into spectacle. Poverty, lack of sanitation, social contradiction, overpopulation, all peer from the background at those viewers whose politics would bring each issue into the foreground. Gardner's sociology is subtle, not absent. The atmospheric qualities of mystery and enchantment are often undercut by the ubiquity of excrement-laden streets and interment by holocaust.

But this level, too, is secondary to Gardner's touch and artistic feel. It is his aesthetic, now honed over 25 years, which pleads for deeper attention. His camera has gained an intimacy with its subjects which seems almost to defy Heisenberg's law that the act of observation alters the observed. It is as if the viewing is done, not by foreigners, but by the trees, spirits, and furniture of Benares.

Due to his extraordinary patience in surrendering to an environment's own terms (he had returned to the city four times before finally shooting), Gardner is granted permission to be a part of the social milieu: the audience is brought fully within the action and feeling of the people as invisible *participants* rather than gaping tourists. Because he has gained the subjects' confidence, he is a *confidant* to intimate moments.

Few film-makers obtain this parity—neither condescension toward nor fear of intrusion—with their colleagues in creation. For Gardner, this entry beyond distance and defenses may pertain both to patience and personality. He walks quietly, like a native American stalking a deer, or in this context, like an Indian priest in

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bare feet. He is invisible, inaudible, a fact epitomized by the absence of narrative voice-over and subtitles. By removing the organizing tyranny of narration and selected music, Gardner places us *within* the setting; we are surrounded by a new environment. Silently, liquidly, he glides from setting to setting as if transporting us on a magic carpet visible only to its passengers.

As a style, this liquidity is engaging. Citizens of Benares do not die, they smoothly pass from this world to a reincarnated existence. Likewise Gardner's audiences do not fade at the end of sequences; they pass from one space to another fluidly, as if gliding over edits. At times, the content seems far less important, as if secondary to an all-pervasive rhythm or flow. As in *Panta Rhei (All Things Flow),* it is the cycles, intervals, and the ecology of time which give the deeper meaning. People and events become like driftwood upon the tides and tempos.

Hence moments are neither sensationalized nor trivialized. As in Bresson and Dreyer (or Buñuel, in absurd moments), and we are left to rank-order, or leave unstructured, our many moments of experience. We welcome images and sounds like guests in a receiving line—each is accorded inspection and a momentary greeting. While some linger more than others in memory, each is soon overtaken by the next. Although three characters may dominate the frame count, they weave in and out of a larger procession and population without preeminence or predictability.

Our being granted permission to intimately experience sacred rituals is signified in numerous ways by Gardner. He provides many point-of-view shots, some of which begin within the action, so that we become "insiders." The camera seems to awaken, then descend the stairs, in much the same way we would if present in the setting. Often we originate with a process, like its "intimates," rather than being attracted toward it from afar, like tourists. When bodies of the dead are being prepared, we encircle them, then follow them, as do others in the procession. There is no diminishing of the volume of a piercing chant to protect us from realism. For 90 minutes we hear and see the actual sights and sounds of the burial industry. In my experience this was not the film which came closest to bringing me to India, it was the first in which I *was* there.

Despite my admiration of Gardner, he misleads when he says *Forest of Bliss* is a film about dying. One can agree with all his other claims about the film's essence—the ubiquity of natural cycles, the transformation of matter, continual change—but it is not so much about death as about how the *living* institutionalize or sanctify dying. Some films, say Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* or *The Seventh Seal,* treat the experience of approaching or facing death. *Forest of Bliss,* however, while granting space to its audience for the contemplation of death, or indeed for a myriad of other subjects, often fixates upon the industry of death, and the population who maintain the orderliness of life's "exits." There are other scenes, other content, but they do not dominate and captivate in the same manner.

In one sense, this centering upon the death ritual is no different than if Gardner had photographed endless births or weddings. The repetitive element of cremation upon cremation suggests naturalness, like the falling of leaves, and yet also the unnaturalness of fulltime dedication by some humans to roles which service the deceased: check-out clerks in vast human supermarkets. Their cyclical, endless routine in many ways alienates them from the larger life cycles of their breathing colleagues. All this Gardner implies to the careful observer.

Such a peering within and beyond the human condition elevates Gardner far beyond cinematic stenographer or academician. If Pound is correct in naming artists "the antennae" of the race, then Gardner is "the membrane." By yielding to the metabolic rate of his surround, he captures not the surface but the subconscious frequency of his subject. It is as if he shares a momentary oneness with the observed, and then shares that communion with his audience.

This is not an aesthetic wavelength everyone seeks to understand. Some still see Gardner's works as cultural analysis or geographical document. During the 1960s particularly, his earlier films seemed socially irrelevant if not imperialist or escapist. Many did not wish to understand Gardner in aesthetic terms. Ethnographic cinema seemed an aristocratic privilege of globe-trotting or human butterfly collecting, with cameras rather than nets. Yet the deeper elements of Gardner's work have always spoken of a universal human dignity: the films

must be forced through an ideological strainer if interpreted as statements primarily about class and culture, whether his or his subjects'. There is more in his films about how we are united than how we have become divided.

If *Forest of Bliss* is nominally about the fact of death, and its surrounding props and scripting, the film is nevertheless ultimately about the art of living. Very few directors intimately perceive this art; Gardner, without script or props, somehow captures it.

Yet if one selects ten film reference books from the library, most will mention Robert Gardner only in passing if at all. If Gardner is included, whether as director, editor, or cameraman, it is likely to be for his 1963 portrait of the Dani people of West New Guinea, *Dead Birds.* Only reference books about documentary film may offer a more complete filmography and brief analysis. Perhaps Gardner's low critical profile is due to the context in which his works were introduced. The *content* of his works—the Hamar people of Ethiopia (*Rivers of Sand,* 1974), the Fulani nomads of Niger (*Deep Hearts,* 1978) seemed to form a compact genre of edited records of cultures remote from North America. Gardner *seemed* to be making "documentary" or "ethnographic" films: although *Dead Birds* had a theatrical release in 35mm, his works were most frequently projected in classrooms or at film festivals which dealt with documentary and ethnographic genres. His name reminded most people, including Margaret Mead, more of anthropology than of Eisenstein or Welles. He was associated more with Harvard (his film credits still read Film Study Center, Harvard University), where he was an administrator for many years and remains a teacher, than with a universal audience, and with fact more than fiction.

This context is too small for Gardner. The international prizes and screenings he is currently receiving, his capture of a culturally and intellectually diverse audience, are only current evidence of universal essences consistently pervading his work. After *Forest of Bliss* (1985) it will be difficult for many to categorize his work as anything less than art and poetry, terms some (including poets such as Lowell and Paz) have used since Gardner's first public appearance.

Whatever its debt to the many genres collectively labelled "documentary," whatever its homage to the city of Benares, *Forest of Bliss* is about Gardner, his way of seeing, artistic style, interpersonal relations, atmosphere, and his observation of how the living surround the dying. It is *not* record, *not* ethnographic study, and *not* beneath the list of important films. Nor can Gardner himself, because his films bypass both categories of "fiction" and "fact," be omitted from the ranks of truly significant filmmakers. Like the subjects of his film, he transcends "the forest of bliss," time, and category.

—THOMAS W. COOPER

FILM BEFORE FILM

(Was Geschach Wirklich Zwischen den Bildern?) Written and directed by Werner Nekes: Music: Anthony Moore.

In *Film Before Film,* Werner Nekes brings together an astonishing array of novelties, gadgets, optical toys, and peep shows—all those contraptions with the Latinate names that circulated for some 500 years before the arrival of movies, and in retrospect, appear precursors of the motion pictures. Nekes's approach seems aggressively anti-chic. With a breathtaking lack of concern for current theory or notions of historiography, he has gone on an exuberant rampage collecting anything that plays with laws of perspective, creates an illusion of movement, works with latent images, or illustrates afterimage effects.

There are several important surprises here, especially the widespread use of pornography in toys generally associated with Victorian innocence. By now, we know all about the titillating French postcard, but Nekes demonstrates how plentiful nudes and fornicating couples also were in magic lantern slides, thaumatropes, lithothanes, and the like. Further, he makes a compelling case for reevaluating the time span of the pre-film era. He demolishes the notion that the technology of cinema effectively starts in the nineteenth century. In fact, in his timetable, the nineteenth century only refines or reorients the crucial inventions, which he locates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Yet, though the film is offered as a straightforward documentary, far more seems to be going on than the simple logging of pre-twentieth-century film artifacts.

This is deadpan show and tell, a reaction against other avant-garde films about early cinema. The well-known conventions, established by film-makers such as Ken Jacobs, Stan Lawder, David Rimmer, and Nekes himself in the late 1960s, revealed highly analytic sensibilities at work on quaint, seemingly primitive texts. Like mad scientists seeking the hidden secrets of the medium in its earliest (hence purest) form, these film-makers presented themselves as obsessives. They ran the same pieces of film over and over, isolated bits of action, roamed over the film surface, magnified details, accelerated and retarded the motion. It was, of course, highly self-referential cinema, the self-conscious meditation of movies upon movies.

Film Before Film tries a new course, the mad scientist now giving way to the genial collector. Gone is the intensive, remorseless analysis of a film like Jacobs's *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* or Al Razutis's *Lumière's Train (Arriving at the Station);* in its place is the expansive, leisurely tour through a cornucopia of optical treasures. Instead of the graphic coarseness of early silents, Nekes traffics in the lush, gorgeous colors and shapes of objects kept in pristine condition. One of the principal pleasures of *Film Before Film* is its strength of composition within the frame that also marks so many of Nekes's earlier films. The images are abundantly beautiful; no commerical photographer has ever worked with richer high-key lighting. Nekes has no interest in analyzing or manipulating his images through editing; instead, he brings the manipulator's hands on-camera, where they constantly fondle, spin, adjust, squeeze, or position the artifacts. Nekes makes tactile pleasure, always part of a toy's appeal, the mainspring of his film.

The film starts with Nekes himself, a poker-faced host in leather vest and striped shirt, seated at a table surrounded by a variety of playthings. Silent and unsmiling, he puts his toys on display. Meanwhile, an unseen narrator lectures on what we are seeing. The voice (regulation BBC in the dubbed version I saw) grinds out information, relentlessly cataloging each object and extemporizing its historical position in the prehistory of cinema. The voice is forever trying to impose a sense of order on this deliriously disorganized array. It's as though Nekes the sensualist is daring Nekes the academic to justify these pleasurable texts as historic artifacts.

It is this double sense of perspective that constantly throws the viewer off-balance: the sardonic fellow on the screen—Herr Drossel-

meyer in casual, modern dress—seems to defy us to intellectualize these fascinating toys, while the script he has written overwhelms us with pedagogical detail. There are more games being played in this film than those documented on the screen. —RUSSELL MERRITT

Controversy and Correspondence

NARRATION ISSUES

Seymour Chatman's review of my book, *Point of View in the Cinema (Film Quarterly,* Fall 1986), is based on a set of assumptions about narrative analysis which the book explicitly rejects. Chatman offers no justification for his methods apparently because he is unaware that there are alternatives. He believes that narration is communication and so "representation" (e.g., speaking and displaying) must be separated from "perception" (e.g., seeing and hearing). A narrator does not perceive, according to Chatman. What he presumably means is that a narrator *has already* perceived, perhaps inaccurately, and is now busily occupied only in telling. The asymmetry Chatman promotes between representation and perception creates a strictly linear, "trickle-down" model of authorship where the world-vision of an Original Source has been left behind as a series of clues and hidden messages for the spectator to unveil. Chatman emphatically states that the "real reader or viewer creates nothing: he/she only *re-creates.*" However, I believe that perception is neither passive nor obvious and cannot be divided neatly between senders and receivers. Perception is itself coded, symbolic and representational (see Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*). Chatman takes a further step by subdividing a narrator's representation into telling or showing. Such a distinction has far-reaching implications which I believe are elaborately misleading (see Part 1 of the Appendix to my book).

Chatman relies on the notions of intention and speech-act theory to buttress his communication metaphor but without confronting any of the problems raised by applying these notions to texts or even to simple sentences, as Noam Chomsky has forcefully argued. How do we discover an intention and verify it? Is there only one? How strongly held must the intention be? What about "failed" or "unconscious" intentions? What if the perceiver understands differently than the author, or not at all? And isn't the measurement of the relative success or failure of an intention merely a judgment of the worker, not the work? As for speech-act theory, what is it that is being analyzed: a fictional performative or a performative of a fiction? Do pictures, music, and noise qualify as "speech"? How should one analyze the free indirect which Ann Banfield calls an "unspeakable" sentence? How should one analyze sentences which are not first person, present tense, or do not explicitly constitute an action? What analogy with person, tense, and act is appropriate for narrative photographs? Chatman's recent book on Antonioni would have been the ideal occasion to explore these issues but I find only passing references to "intention," nothing about "speech-acts," and little concerning "narration."

Chatman seems to draw closer to my approach (which he says overemphasizes the reader's share) when he concedes that the reader must "infer the intentions . . . *inherent* in the text . . . intention is by definition inscribed in the text" (his emphasis). Perhaps by "intention," then, Chatman simply means to refer us to "context," to those cues which prompt a reader to reevaluate literal meanings, recognize conventions, test certain hypotheses, or employ various interpretive procedures (e.g., the construction of a "narrator"). Even more to the point would be an acknowledgment that texts often employ *several* levels of narration which operate simultaneously with varying degrees of compatibility. But then, paradoxically, Chatman opts for an extreme position: he says that even when a film is projected in an empty theater, a narrator and an author are "implied." By whom? Chatman's version of the old chestnut of a tree crashing in the forest when no one is present to hear the sound has now been extended to a projector which turns itself on and to *inferences* which are made in the absence of anyone to derive them. Either Chatman has done away with perceivers altogether or else he is claiming that representation can exist only as someone's perception or as some imaginary person's perception. Is everything now mental, or is nothing mental? What Chatman has failed to appreciate is that there are other theories of representation not founded on the communication metaphor.

Finally, a note about the price of my book. When Chatman stated that its price was a lofty $62.70, I almost imagined the sound of royalty money piling up in some faraway treasure chest. However, *Books In Print* (1985-1986)—received by my library in December 1985—reports the correct and more modest price of $34.95 for the hardcover, and $14.95 for the paperback. —EDWARD BRANIGAN

Seymour Chatman replies:—

FQ's encouragement of dialogue between reviewers and authors is admirable, and I am glad to respond

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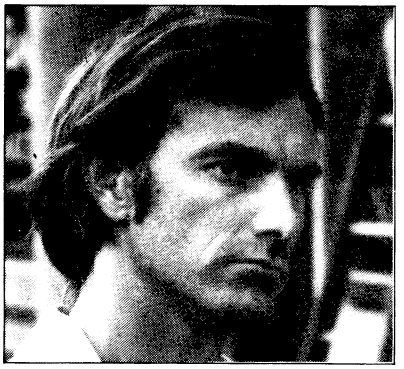
to Edward Branigan's critique of my review. Differences of opinion are not only inevitable but necessary, and theory can only profit from a full airing of them: we all learn from each other, especially when we disagree.

Since I am just now engaged in an essay entitled "The Cinematic Narrator" which attempts to deal with many of the questions Branigan raises, I would ask him to wait for that fuller statement of my position. (The essay will be a chapter in a book tentatively entitled *Coming to Terms.*) In the meantime some relevant sentences can be found on p. 155 of *Story and Discourse* and in my review in *Wide Angle* (vol. 8, nos. 3/4, 1986, 139–41) of Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film,* a book which shares Branigan's spectator-centered orientation.

Let me respond here only to the questions concerning perception and intention. I argue that the narrator (whether cinematic, literary, theatrical, painterly, or whatever) does not perceive but represents, either by telling (i.e., diegetically) or by showing (mimetically). Branigan is incorrect in inferring that "What [I] presumably mean . . . is that a narrator *has already* perceived, perhaps inaccurately, and is now busily occupied only in telling." No: what I mean is that the act of narrating occurs at a level different from that of story (fabula), namely that of discourse (sujet), and that perception, as far as text is concerned, is a meaningful issue only at the level of story. The narrator may or may not have been a character in the story: if he/she was, then he/she did indeed perceive, but only "back then," during—i.e., at the level of—story, not "now" at the level of discourse. (From the narratological point of view, the homodiegetic or first-person narrator is always two persons: narrator "now" in the discourse, and character "back then" in the story.) This is true even though the story events occurred only seconds before their discoursive representation, their narration. And it is true in a "real-time" medium like cinema. In many cases, however, especially in films, the narrator was not a character in the story, and so functions simply as the agent of representation, of showing. It makes no particular sense to ask "How did he/she/it come by the information"? The function of agency is simply built into the narrative construct. (This is true even if the text goes to considerable pains, as for example in Conrad's fiction, to account for how the narrator came by the story.)

I don't see why this should be called "asymmetrical"—if anything, the Branigan-Bordwell emphasis on viewer-orientation (like Stanley Fish's "reader-response" approach to literary interpretation) seems to me much more one-sided. Nor can I see how my argument that the reader or viewer *re-creates* the story can be said to assign him/her a passive role. A lot of work goes into re-creation. Of course, the reader or viewer must perceive before he/she can



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re-create; nothing in my argument denies that. But the audience's perception clearly occurs at a different level than that of characters: it engages the story not directly, but mediately, through the discourse; it works extradiegetically, not intradiegetically. (That's what we mean when we say that the real audience must successfully identify with the implied reader and the narratee projected by the text.) But I see no reason for also attributing such extradiegetic perception to the narrator. In the model that makes most sense to me, an implied author "invents" the whole narrative and chooses a certain narrator, whether homo- or heterodiegetic as the agent to "present" it.

As for the battery of questions concerning my view of "intention" I shall only say that I do not mean the term in the sense of the real author's desires at the moment of creation, but rather that of the implied author, that is, the text taken as a whole. I am speaking of *textual* intention which for a variety of reasons I would not want to identify with "context." Nor am I assuming that photographs, noises, music, and the like are analogous with speech. But they clearly are semiotic and should be treated as capable of contributing to narration, both denotatively and connotatively. As for the film being projected in an empty theater: by "implied" I meant nothing more than that the narrator remains "immanent" or "incipient" or "inherent in" the text even when it is not being re-created by an audience. I certainly do not posit the drawing of inferences in the absence of persons.

I am glad to hear that Branigan's book costs less than the publisher's slip indicated, and that it is now available in paperback. I hope that he (and the rest of us, for that matter) may begin to receive decent recompense for all that labor.

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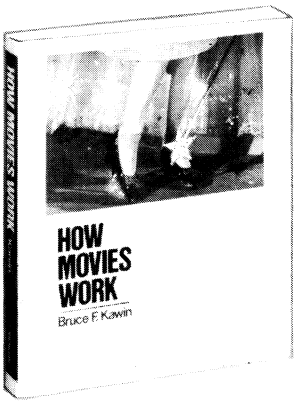

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